

The Impact of the UK Temporary Employment Industry in Assisting Agency Workers since the Year 2000

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with assessing the impact of the UK temporary employment industry in assisting agency workers since the year 2000, and incorporates four research questions: (1) To what extent have temporary employment agencies provided employment opportunities to vulnerable groups since the year 2000? (2) How are individuals psychologically affected by working as temporary agency workers, and what are the implications? (3) Individual agency workers often interact with several different groups including temporary employment agencies, third party employers, permanent workers and trade unions. Are there tensions that exist between these groups, and how do they manifest themselves? (4) Recent legislative development has occurred with the adoption of the Agency Workers Directive. What are the implications for individual agency workers and temporary employment agencies?

In order to investigate these questions, the study's research design incorporated semi-structured interviews and ethnographic analyses of diary extracts. The interviewees consisted of twenty-five participants, including agency workers, their permanent counterparts, recruitment consultants, and representatives from third party employers. I also recorded my experiences as an agency worker during several assignments, and the ethnographic analysis of these diary extracts represented a second source of findings. The approach of the thesis challenged the traditional quantitative method that has been prevalent throughout previous psychologically-orientated studies into agency working.

Results highlighted the importance of motive, as it was found to influence how agency workers viewed their ensuing employment. Permanent workers' perception of their company's motive for utilising agency staff was also highlighted as significant to their resulting reaction to their organisation's recruitment practices. The method of using agency workers to protect pre-existing staff from redundancy was indicated, and permanent workers will often view this employment practice favourably. The lack of obligation inherent in the contract increases the vulnerability of agency workers, and may cause reduced levels of job security and organisational commitment within the individual. The assumption that agency working is short term and cyclical can also lead to isolation from the workforce, as permanent workers may consider agency staff as non-committal, dispensable, and un-invested in the organisation.

Several findings relating to the relationships which form between the main parties also emerged. A lack of contact between the recruitment consultant and the individual worker represented a potential obstacle, whereas the priority that temporary employment agencies placed upon fulfilling the needs of their client companies was also identified. The agency employment industry argues that it provides individuals with opportunities for permanent transition into the third party employer, but limited autonomy, short-term assignments, and the simplistic nature of tasks represented significant barriers to achieving this goal. The thesis concluded that the recently-adopted Agency Workers Directive would result in a reduction of open-ended employment arrangements, and that tenure would typically be established prior to each assignment. Recommendations for future research included a post-adoption analysis of the impact of the Agency Workers Directive, and an increased focus upon permanent worker reaction and perception regarding their company's utilisation of agency staff.

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas. Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed Date

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1. Overview of the Research

1.1. A Brief Introduction to Agency Working

In early 2009, reports emerged over the loss of employment for a substantial number of workers from BMW's Mini Cowley plant in Oxford (BBC, 2009a). Further scrutiny revealed the sacked employees consisted of eight hundred and fifty agency workers, sparking a national debate that revolved around the degree of security these workers were afforded in their positions of employment. Industry officials and academic researchers had raised concerns regarding the precarious nature of agency work for several years, but the nature of how the news was given to workers sparked mainstream public interest, drawing the media spotlight and ensuring the incident became a national news story. Bernard Moss, from the union 'Unite', reported that workers were told one hour from the end of their shift that they had been laid off with immediate effect. This led to angry scenes where workers threw fruit at union leaders, claiming that they felt betrayed (BBC, 2009a).

Temporary agency work has been a central topic of employment discourse in the last few years, with a variety of research investigating the implications at individual, organisational, and national levels (Biggs, Burchell, & Millmore, 2006; Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Forde & Slater, 2006; Nienhüser & Matiaske, 2006). During this time, studies have forwarded a variety of conflicting definitional, demographical, and psychological findings. An extensive level of understanding is required in the area, as recent years have witnessed considerable interest in temporary agency employment. This interest has emerged against a backdrop of rapid growth in this form of working (CIETT, 2000; Forde & Slater, 2006).

Debate between advocates and opponents of the agency employment industry in regards to the individual impact of agency working has existed for years. Henson (1996, p. 4) outlined some of the US industry claims, which included: "...greater scheduling flexibility, varied and satisfying work experiences, skill acquisition and development, access to permanent employment opportunities, and a cornucopia of other supposed monetary and non monetary rewards". Despite these claims, Henson's (1996) findings indicated that these claims were often unsupported. Interest in this group of workers peaked in 2008, when heated debate throughout Europe culminated with the agreement to adopt the Agency Workers Directive, a contentious piece of legislation that attempts to address the disparities in pay, employment protection, and opportunities. At the time of writing, the Directive is

planned to take effect throughout the UK on the 1st of October, 2011. In order to appreciate the issues faced by agency workers, an understanding must be reached regarding the heterogeneity of temporary contracts between countries, psychological and motivational variations between worker groups, and the precarious nature of employment often associated with agency employment.

Research into the employment of agency workers has highlighted several potential problems faced by individuals and their employers, many of which stem from the triangular nature of the contract (Blacklock, 2008; Lavin, 2005; Storrie, 2002), or the potentially negative reactions experienced by agency workers when joining a company on a temporary basis (de Gilder, 2003; Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Hall, 2006). Flexibility is often cited in the literature as a benefit that individuals and organisations can take advantage of, yet this may also translate into a lack of protection for agency workers in terms of their contracts of employment, or their treatment at the hands of the third party organisation. Previous research has indicated a variety of issues that surround the use of agency workers in relation to psychological aspects, including job satisfaction (Biggs & Swailes, 2006; Booth, Fransconi, & Frank, 2002), perceived job security (Allan & Sienko, 1997; Feather & Rauter, 2004), and organisational commitment (de Gilder, 2003; Newton, 1996), although research into the area of agency worker employment has led to confusing and contradictory findings with regard to these problems.

The timing of this thesis is important for two main reasons. At the time of writing, the recession that began around 2007/8 remains a key concern for organisations in the national and international marketplace. Meeting the demands of clients and customers has become increasingly important as businesses try to stay afloat during financial uncertainty. Agency workers can offer businesses a degree of flexibility that other worker groups are unlikely to match, making their utilisation potentially vital to the employment strategies of companies. Consequently, many regard agency workers as a key component to economic recovery. This claim has been made in light of the increased flexibility and route to permanent employment that agency working can offer business and individuals respectively. As a result, understanding the implications of agency worker utilisation at an individual and organisational level has never been more important. The second reason relates to the development of legislation labelled the Agency Workers Directive. The Directive has set out several guidelines that will directly impact upon the contractual obligations that organisations must commit to when employing agency staff, and will be a key concern to companies that plan to use agency workers in the future.

1.2. Focus of the Research

The thesis will investigate the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent have temporary employment agencies provided employment opportunities to vulnerable employment groups since the year 2000?
- 2) How are individuals psychologically affected by working as temporary agency workers, and what are the implications?
- 3) Individual agency workers often interact with several different groups including temporary employment agencies, third party employers, and permanent workers. Are there tensions that exist between these groups, and how do they manifest themselves?
- 4) Recent legislative development has occurred with the adoption of the Agency Workers Directive. What are the implications for individual agency workers and temporary employment agencies?

There is little doubt that one of the key motivators for employers' utilisation of agency workers is that of flexibility, yet advocates of temporary agency employment often claim that this form of working provided similar benefits for individuals who would typically struggle to find employment under more traditional circumstances (Ellingson, Gruys, & Sackett, 1998; Thomas & Berry, 2005). This situation has undoubtedly been exacerbated by the current recession, and the increased risk of redundancy that it can represent. Therefore, the first focus of the research is to establish the degree to which these opportunities have been provided, and whether these opportunities have proved advantageous to their recipients.

Psychological research into agency employment has consisted of a series of studies that have applied a variety of psychological measures. These measures often emerge from research into traditional employment relationships, and are used in an attempt to identify and measure differences between permanent and temporary working situations. Rather than providing clarification, findings have often proven inconsistent and inconclusive (De Cuyper, de Jong, De Witte, Isaksson, Rigotti, & Schalk, 2008), and the thesis will focus upon identifying and addressing these discrepancies.

The temporary employment industry contains several groups who interact, including agency workers, the temporary employment agencies they sign with, the third party employers that they are assigned to, and the permanent staff that work alongside them. Research into the various interactions that occur between each of these parties has been scarce, and the third focus of the thesis will address this gap by exploring these interactions and the potential tensions that may result. This will be achieved by engaging representatives from each of these groups, enabling the study to consider the variety of perspectives associated with the employment of agency workers. One such issue at the time of writing is the Agency Workers Directive, set to take effect on the 1st of October, 2011. The timing of the thesis allows it to gauge the reaction to the planned implementation from an organisational and individual point of view.

1.3. The Assumptions of the Thesis

As the underlying epistemology of the current study, constructivism differs a great deal from the positivist and realist approaches that are dominant in the natural sciences. Realist approaches believe that the structure in the world is independent of human conceptual abilities, whilst an anti-realist approach like constructivism would consider that such claims are inconsistent, at least in part because there is no way they can be made without using concepts from a human conceptual scheme (Garnham & Oakhill, 1994). Constructivism describes the individual human subject engaging with others in the world and making sense of them (Crotty, 2003), resulting in a primarily individualistic constructionist understanding.

In contrast to the hypothesis-driven methods of investigation that are central to many previous studies into the employment of agency workers, the current thesis will focus upon several open-ended research questions. As a result, the study's constructivist epistemology influences the entire thesis, from the aims of the research questions, the methods of gathering data, the techniques of analysing the information, and the inferences made by any resultant findings. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is the key theoretical perspective that underlies the gathering and analysis of data.

IPA represents the study's predominant theoretical perspective, and is strongly rooted in Constructivism due to its focus upon establishing how individuals make sense of their experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This approach is manifested in this study's use of semi-structured interviews. The participant's

recollection of phenomena is integral to the practice of IPA, which relates to arguably the greatest influence upon the approach, that of phenomenology.

Phenomenology is the philosophical approach to the study of experience, and its underlying motive argues that by setting aside any prevailing understanding of these phenomena and revisiting the experience, new meaning may emerge (Crotty, 2003). The founder of phenomenology as a philosophy was Edmund Husserl, whose criticism of the tendency of psychologists to turn away from concrete experience led to the famous 'Husserlian' slogan: return to the things themselves, as experienced (Ashworth, 2008). The focus upon an individual's experience strongly links phenomenology to constructivism, as it requires us to engage with phenomena in our world and make sense of them directly and immediately (Crotty, 2003). By relying upon the participant's interpretation of past experiences, IPA draws upon the second major influence of hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics can be broadly defined as the philosophy of interpretation (Crotty, 2003), and originates from the interpretation of texts. The data that researchers have applied hermeneutic analysis to has since expanded to include unwritten sources, comprising of human practices, human events, and human situations, in an attempt to 'read' these in ways that bring understanding (Smith et al, 2009). The influence of the approach is further increased by the existence of a double hermeneutic, which occurs during the analysis of data gathered during interviews with participants. The interviewee's 'meaning-making' is first-order and the researcher's 'sense-making' is second-order, ensuring that the original experience is interpreted twice.

The adoption of hermeneutic analysis emphasises my influence as the researcher, which is further increased by the incorporation of diary extracts recorded during my time as a temporary agency worker. The role of quantitative researchers can differ significantly to those in qualitative studies, as efforts are made to increase objectivity by reducing the degree of influence the researcher exerts upon their participants, data gathering, and analyses. Burr (2003, p. 152) has previously questioned these efforts, arguing that: "No human being can step outside of their humanity and view the world from no position at all, which is what the idea of objectivity suggests, and this is just as true of scientists as everyone else".

The third major influence upon IPA is Idiography, which is concerned with the particular and operates at two levels: the commitment in the sense of detail and analysis, and the commitment to understanding how a particular experiential

phenomenon has been understood from the perspective of particular people in a particular context (Smith et al, 2009). This conflicts with the 'Nomothetic' approach that embodies the majority of research in the area of agency working, as such studies are more concerned with making claims at a large group or population level and establishing general laws of human behaviour. In contrast, the current thesis will analyse diary extracts of the researcher and detailed interview data from individuals who reside in a variety of different positions throughout the agency employment industry.

1.4. The Structure of the Thesis

Chapter two introduces the reader to the category of temporary workers known as agency workers, before considering the triangular contract synonymous with agency worker employment. The contract has been cited as the source of several difficulties, and these will be split into the legal standing of agency workers, the increased vulnerability to economic fluctuation, and exposure to sub-standard working conditions. The chapter continues by providing the reader with a statistical understanding of the agency employment industry by exploring several quantitative sources of data that have attempted to establish the numbers of agency workers in the UK. Conflicting findings are prominent throughout the thesis, and are represented by the varying estimates cited by demographic research. The chapter concludes by providing an economic context of agency worker utilisation by exploring the financial incentives that this form of employment can provide at an individual and organisational level.

Whilst chapter two introduced the reader to the triangular contract, chapter three will explore the various relationships which can form between the main parties as a result. These interactions have often been overlooked by research, yet may prove central to an individual's experience of agency employment. Several studies have considered the influence that agency workers can have upon the perceptions of pre-existing permanent workers, and findings will be split between the variables of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and job security. The extent of benefits that agency working can provide individuals is central to the thesis, and these will be considered in relation to the role the agency employment industry can play in the current global recession, the opportunities for transition into permanent roles, and the levels of training that agency workers encounter.

Chapter four will provide a context of agency worker utilisation by exploring the most frequently cited benefit at an individual and organisational level; that of flexibility.

Possessing a flexible workforce has become a key aim for organisations attempting to function in the modern day world of work, and temporary employment agencies represent a potential ally in achieving this fluidity. The chapter begins by tracing the origins of the flexible workforce and its emergence as a desirable workforce trait. The reaction of researchers and social commentators to its increased popularity will also be explored. The agency employment industry has been a significant factor in the development of flexible working arrangements, and the benefits that these arrangements represent will be evaluated from an individual perspective. The chapter will conclude by exploring the recent debate surrounding the emergence and adoption of the Agency Workers Directive, before considering the varying claims about the predicted impact that legislative change will have upon organisations and individuals in the UK.

Chapter five marks the beginning of the thesis's analysis of the psychological literature relating to the agency employment industry. Discrepancies between findings occur throughout research into agency working, and the chapter will begin by forwarding one of the potential causes of this difficulty. Several psychological concepts have received the greatest attention from researchers, and chapter five will continue by focussing upon the variables of job satisfaction and job security. The antecedents, findings, and implications will be considered for each variable, and the concept of the psychological contract will also be explored in relation to agency workers. A similar approach will also be adopted in the following chapter, which will begin by highlighting the difficulties that have stemmed from the triangular contract of employment, and continue by focussing upon the variables of organisational commitment and perceived organisational support.

When reviewing previous research into the agency employment industry, several obstacles and difficulties become apparent. Chapter seven will serve to outline a research method that will attempt to address these problems, beginning with the epistemological and theoretical perspectives of the thesis. The dominance of quantitative method in the area has been called into question throughout the thesis, and the underpinnings of the research method have limited the current study's exposure to these concerns. The chapter will continue by summarising the data gathering process, which consisted of semi-structured interviews and ethnographic analysis, before evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of these techniques. The chapter concludes with a reflexive analysis that explores my influence upon the thesis in the role of researcher.

A recurring theme that emerged when analysing the psychological literature into agency worker utilisation was the motives of individuals, as well as their perceptions of what their time in agency employment represented. The significance that previous researchers have placed upon these motives has varied, whilst others have struggled to process the sheer variety of perceptions through the use of quantitative method. Chapter eight will focus upon these motives by exploring qualitative data from the work diary recorded during my time in agency work, and the semi-structured interviews I completed with representatives from each main party. These have been broadly divided into the individual motives of agency workers, and the motives that companies possess when engaging the services of a temporary employment agency. The chapter concludes by highlighting the importance of motive in the formulation of perceptions that agency workers possess towards their work, and their two 'employers'.

Understanding the benefits that temporary employment agencies can provide is an integral part of the thesis, and chapter nine begins by exploring the role that recruitment consultants can play in providing opportunities to potentially vulnerable individuals. Success in this role often relies upon establishing relationships and meeting the needs of the worker and third party employer, and the chapter will continue by addressing the lack of research into this area. The relationship that is forged between the temporary employment agency and the client company has also been overlooked by previous studies, and the chapter will conclude by exploring how this relationship is formed and nurtured. Establishing an attachment with organisations can prove integral to the success of the agency as a business, and the priority that agencies may therefore place upon the needs of the company may prove detrimental to the individual agency worker.

The motive and the relationship with the temporary employment agency can prove significant for the perceptions that individuals possess towards agency employment, but the relationship with the third party employer may prove the most influential aspect of an individual's experience. Agency workers may often spend a significant proportion of time on assignment, making interaction with the employer and their staff an influential factor when evaluating an individual's experiences in agency work. After considering the treatment that agency workers experience at the hands of the client company in relation to permanent staff, the chapter will continue by exploring findings from the psychological concepts outlined in chapters five and six. The chapter will conclude by exploring the interactions between agency workers and the pre-existing permanent workforce present in the third party employer, and

how these can affect an individual's experiences of agency employment.

Recent years have witnessed various discussions surrounding the decision to implement legislative change, culminating in December 2008 with the agreed adoption of the Agency Workers Directive. At the time of writing, the UK date of implementation stands as the 1st of October, 2011, yet debate has still raged over the benefits and potential problems that the legislation represents for individuals and organisations alike. Chapter eleven will explore this debate by assessing data gathered during interviews with a variety of different perspectives. Previous research has highlighted the increased costs for third party employers and the potential drop in working opportunities for individual agency workers, and analysis in the chapter will extend to encompass the views of temporary employment agencies and permanent worker counterparts. The perspectives of agencies have received relatively little attention in the literature, despite their significant exposure to any changes outlined in the Directive. The opinions of permanent workers have also been overlooked, yet their reaction could prove a significant factor in the changes encountered by agency workers as a result of the Directive.

The thesis will conclude with chapter twelve, which will begin by reiterating the four research questions, before outlining the major findings relating to each. The chapter will continue by highlighting the limitations of the research and its approach, before concluding by establishing the most important contributions to knowledge that the thesis has provided. The thesis will begin by defining the temporary category of agency workers.

2. Agency Workers, and the Financial Implications of their Utilisation

2.1. Introduction

Agency work represents a unique form of employment that has received increased attention in recent years, most notably due to the decision to adopt the Agency Workers Directive that was reached in December 2008. Previous psychological studies into the working experiences of these employees have forwarded a series of findings that have frequently conflicted. Supporters of the agency employment industry have cited increased accessibility and flexibility at an individual and organisational level, yet critics have highlighted disparities in treatment with permanent workers, and questionable employment practices committed by third party employers.

The primary concern of the current chapter is to introduce the reader to the temporary worker category known as agency workers, before placing them in the context of the UK labour force. The term 'agency worker' will be defined, as will the characteristics of the contract, which can heavily impact upon the experiences of individuals involved in the industry. Future chapters will consider a variety of implications that have been associated with the agency worker contract, including their legal standing, vulnerability to economic fluctuation, and the working conditions they experience.

The chapter will then ascertain the proportion of the UK workforce that are employed as agency workers, allowing a greater understanding to be reached regarding the number of individuals potentially affected by the issues discussed in later chapters. Government-led attempts to accurately determine the number of agency workers employed in the UK took place after the agreed adoption of the Agency Workers Directive, yet these efforts soon encountered difficulties. Analysis completed by the department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) focussed upon three datasets, which included the Labour Force Survey (LFS), a Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) census, and a Survey of Recruitment Agencies (SORA). The conclusions for each source of data vary considerably, and the chapter will continue by exploring the reasons for the discrepancies.

The current study's quantitative analysis is then extended to include financial aspects of the UK's temporary employment industry, before comparing national levels of temporary worker utilisation between countries residing in the EU. The Agency Workers Directive will become law throughout the European Union no later than December 5th, 2011, making national variations increasingly significant. Explanations are then put forward for the degree of variety that exists between national distributions of temporary labour throughout European countries, and how these distributions may be affected by the impending legislative change known as the Agency Workers Directive.

2.2. Agency Worker Definition

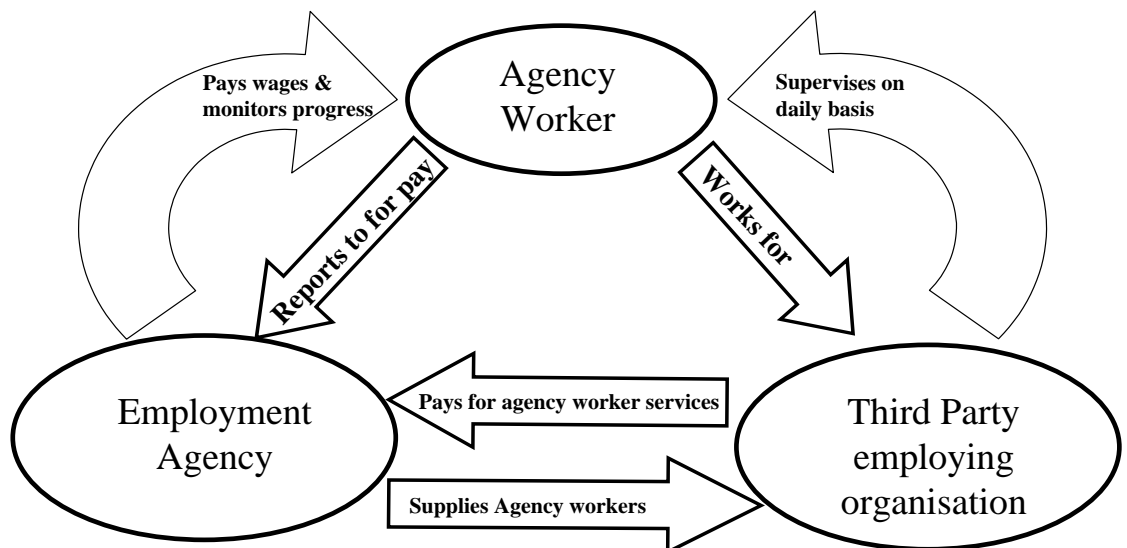
Agency workers are not a new phenomenon, as they have existed in Europe since at least the 18th century, although the modern temporary work industry did not emerge until the late 1940s and early 1950s (Storrie, 2002). Agency workers fall into the category of 'temporary worker' as their tenure within a company is for a limited period of time (Biggs & Swailes, 2006). When looking to apply a definition to this temporary worker category, the unusual contractual agreement that agency workers possess becomes prominent, as agency workers can be defined as individuals: "... who are employed by or have a contract for services with the employment business and who work on assignment with a third party hirer." (BERR, 2009a; p. 15). The hirer, often referred to as the third party employer, user firm, end-user, or client, will approach the temporary employment agency in order to gain access to the individuals that they have on their books, and the length of time these workers spend with the host organisation may vary from one day to several months (Breugal, Olffen, & Olie, 2005). Although short-term contracts of limited duration are often used to characterise temporary agency work, some agency workers have open-ended employment contracts with their agencies (Claes, 2005), and others see it as a long-term career choice (Storrie, 2002). The triangular relationship described in the agency worker definition provided above is not exclusive to the UK, as Nienhüser and Matiaske (2006) found this to be the case in all of the fifteen EU countries that they surveyed. Agency workers in the EU are often much younger than other employees, and whilst the Netherlands has the youngest workforce of temporary agency workers, the UK probably has the oldest (Storrie, 2002).

2.3. Characteristics of the Contract

The contract of employment utilised in temporary agency work is arguably the most influential feature associated with this form of employment, and represents a central

theme of the thesis. Unlike standard contracts held between employees and employers, the contracts for agency workers include three main parties: the individual agency worker, the temporary employment agency they are signed with, and the third party employer they work for (Claes, 2005; Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Forde & Slater, 2005). Temporary employment agencies range in size, from global corporations, national organisations, and local independent branches (Druker & Stanworth, 2001), and will typically be approached by organisations looking to incorporate agency staff into their company. Agency workers will then work for the third party employer, but will receive payment from their temporary employment agency (Druker & Stanworth, 2001), who will invoice the third party employer for the time that the agency worker has spent with them. The picture for temporary agency workers is complicated by the fact that there are three parties, and six sets of mutual expectations (Druker & Stanworth, 2004). Figure 1 is a pictorial representation of the form that these contracts take.

Figure 2.1. The Triangular Relationship of Agency Working (Biggs & Swailes, 2006; p. 131).



Researchers and interested parties reporting upon the individual effects of agency working will often refer to the temporary, triangular form that the contract takes as the point of origin for many of the reported benefits that this form of employment can offer (CBI, 2008a; Thomas & Berry, 2005), as well as many of the negative connotations (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007; Forde & Slater, 2005; Guest, 2004), and these will be explored later on in the thesis. Despite the benefits argued by

advocates of the agency employment industry, problems relating to legal protection, economic fluctuation, and working conditions have also been outlined, and these issues will now be discussed in greater detail. It must also be noted that these problems date prior to the adoption of the Agency Workers Directive, which at the time of writing has been set for UK implementation on October 1st 2011. The possible implications the Directive may have upon these areas will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

2.3.1. The Legal Standing of Agency Workers

The protection afforded to agency workers is a contentious issue, and has been addressed in recent debates relating to the Agency Workers Directive (TUC, 2007b; CBI, 2008b). A similar piece of legislation labelled the 'Fixed-term Employees' regulations came into force on the 1st of October, 2002. This change in employment law was aimed at preventing discrimination against fixed-term contractors, who represent another temporary worker category. The legislative change was tasked with eliminating the exploitation that arose from successive fixed-term contracts being used in place of open-ended contracts, but excluded agency workers from this protection as a result of their employment status (Green, 2008). As a result of their triangular contract, the employment status of agency workers in the UK is rather complex and often not clear (McMullen, 2008; Storrie, 2002), as it can become uncertain whether the individual is a member of the third party employer or the employment agency that supplied them (Forde & Slater, 2005; Williams, 2004). As well as the complexities that arise from the involvement of two organisations, rather than one, research by Green (2008) has indicated that agency workers have also experienced difficulty when asserting employee rights because their status as employees (as opposed to self-employed) was called into question by some aspects of employment legislation. In UK employment law there is an important distinction between 'employees' and 'workers', and the classification of many agency staff as 'workers' means they are excluded from the entitlement to important employment rights, like unfair dismissal and redundancy protection, which are only available to 'employees' (TUC, 2007b).

Confusion has existed with regard to who actually employs an agency worker, and previous cases in the UK Court of Appeal have demonstrated this lack of clarification. Warren (2008) highlighted the earlier case of *Dacas v Brook Street Bureau (UK) Ltd*, where confusion arose when the UK Court of Appeal held that, even where there is no express contract between the end-user and the agency

worker, there is an implied contract. However, Warren (2008) also cited the case of *James v Greenwich County Council* in early 2008, in which the Court of Appeal clarified that it will rarely be appropriate to imply a contract between the worker and the end-user where the agency arrangements are genuinely and properly documented. The responsibility of the third party employer was further absolved early on in 2008, as a judgement in the Court of Appeal confirmed a prior ruling that agency workers cannot claim an employment relationship between worker and labour user, regardless of the amount of time they may have worked in a particular role (Blacklock, 2008). Research by Lavin (2005) also focused on this issue, stating that agency workers were excluded from the right to claim unfair dismissal compensation and equality of treatment, unless they were an employee of either the agency or the client business. As well as experiencing restricted capacity to challenge the decisions of the client firm, Druker and Stanworth (2001) argued that agency workers are unlikely to be party to collective support by a trade union to the same degree as a permanent employee.

This legal confusion has translated into a variety of possible classifications. Agency workers have been termed employees of: employment agencies, hiring companies, employment businesses, and personal service companies. Agency staff may be more than one, or even none of these, whilst others have even been labelled 'self employed' (House of Commons, 2008). Research by Kalleberg (2000) reported how the emergence of the triangular employment relationship constituted a major challenge to labour law, unionisation, and other aspects of industrial relations systems. This has also resulted in complex legal issues over which organisation is responsible for complying with governmental regulations, and which organisation is liable for accidents and other aspects of the employment relationship (Kalleberg, 2000). Because responsibility is difficult to establish, agency workers are also typically excluded from rights such as those concerning statutory notice, unfair dismissal, redundancy, or a return to work after maternity (Arrowsmith, 2006).

Research in the US by Golden and Appelbaum (1992) also suggested a lack of protection, claiming that, since the compensation level of contingent labour is low relative to that incurred by permanent counterparts, the pressures associated with domestic and international competition may increase the need for staff employed on a non-permanent basis. The individual benefits of increased protection for agency workers appear obvious; however, Lavin (2005) argued that if agency workers did enjoy such protection, the cost of utilisation would rise and the incentive for employing them would fall. This has been one of the key concerns in the debates

that ran up to the decision to adopt the Agency Workers Directive made at the end of 2008, and is a contentious issue that will be discussed further in chapter four. Despite the level of criticism levelled at the decision to adopt the Directive, supporters of the legislation maintained that the agreed adoption was a step in the right direction for giving agency staff rights that they have previously been denied. The situation faced by agency workers in the UK contrasts with several other EU member states that possess greater protection for the equivalent group of workers, including Belgium, Spain, and the Netherlands (Arrowsmith, 2006; Storrie, 2002). The level of protection afforded to agency workers has witnessed increased scrutiny in recent years, most notably due to the reaction of companies to the recent global financial difficulties.

2.3.2. Agency Worker Vulnerability to Economic Fluctuation

For many companies, the global financial crisis at the time of writing has translated into varying levels of demand and economic fluctuation for companies to consider, and the limited protection afforded by the agency worker contract has left many agency staff more vulnerable to these fluctuations. Research in the Netherlands found that: "In economic downturns, people with a temporary contract can be laid off without having to be paid premiums to laid off personnel and without the risk of strikes or other types of protests." (de Gilder, 2003; p. 589). De Gilder (2003) went on to claim that: "In times of economic recovery, organisations that are uncertain about the strength of the recovery may hesitate to employ people on a permanent basis, whereas others can adapt to the situation by hiring temporary employees until it is clear that expansion is permanent." (de Gilder, 2003; p. 589). Conley (2002) also reported similar findings during a series of qualitative interviews with UK-based councillors. In the study, one councillor suggested that the increased use of temporary workers relieved pressure that resulted from a 'no compulsory redundancy' agreement with the unions, as he considered that the shedding of temporary workers in times of budgetary difficulty did not constitute redundancy, allowing jobs to be lost without breaking the redundancy agreement (Conley, 2002).

Research by Felstead and Gallie (2004) argued that the continued growth of non-standard working arrangements throughout the developed world suggested that organisations may be segmenting their workforces along these lines in order to use non-standard workers as a buffer to protect the privileges enjoyed by those in the 'core' of the organisation. Such employment practices may well protect organisations in times of economic uncertainty, but this protection comes at the

expense of the job security afforded to temporary staff, a situation that other research has also highlighted (e.g. de Gilder, 2003; Golden & Appelbaum, 1992). Chapter four will explore the organisational motive for increasing flexibility within the workforce, and the potentially negative impact that these employment practices have upon the individual will be considered in chapters five and six.

2.3.3. The Working Conditions Experienced by Agency Workers

When studying the use of agency workers in Europe, Nienhüser and Matiaske (2006) found a general discrimination in the form of less favourable working conditions and compensation in each of the 15 EU countries surveyed. Such results cannot be generalised, as the study only surveyed an average of sixteen full-time and seven part-time agency workers from each country, making it impossible to accurately contrast between these countries. Research in the UK by Storrie (2002) provided little indication that poorer working conditions exist for agency workers compared to their permanent counterparts, and labour force survey data shows only a slightly higher accident rate for agency workers compared to those on open-ended contracts. However, state inspections have found that third party employers and temporary employment agencies often provide inadequate health and safety training (Storrie, 2002). Similar findings are outlined in a study on Dutch metal workers in two companies. Agency workers were reported to possess poorer work clothes than company employees, as well as disposable earplugs instead of specially adapted ones. This was attributed to the fact that the agency workers had to pay for their own, although the duration of the working relationship seemed to be more important when explaining these differences, and similar difficulties were not reported in relation to co-worker treatment (Torka & Schyns, 2007).

In the UK, recent legislative changes have helped to clarify the responsibilities of agencies and firms with regard to health and safety issues and the provision of information, but the protection of agency workers is still patchy and the nature of agency work can prevent workers from fully experiencing the protection they should receive (Forde & Slater, 2006). The Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) can exert influence upon employment agencies; however, the REC is a voluntary body and there is no obligation on agencies to join or abide by the code. Even when members breach the code and are expelled, they can continue to operate as an agency in the UK (TUC, 2007b). Storrie (2002) also highlighted the lack of clear lines of responsibility as a result of the triangular contract that can make it difficult for temporary agency workers to achieve redress, since when an

accident occurs, both the agency and the third party employer may refuse liability. Support does exist in the form of the Employment Agency Standards (EAS) Inspectorate, which is tasked with investigating complaints over the conduct of companies involved in the employment of agency workers (EAS, 2009).

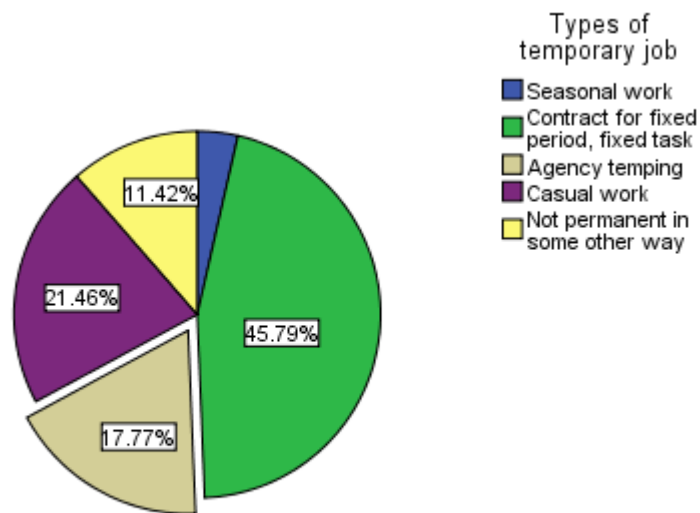
So far the chapter has introduced the worker group known as agency workers, and discussed some of the concerns attributed to their employment. The chapter will continue by placing agency workers into a UK workforce context by analysing several national surveys, beginning with the labour force survey.

2.4. The Number of Agency Workers in the UK

On the 5th of December, 2008, the European Parliament agreed upon plans to adopt the Agency Workers Directive. EU countries were given a maximum of three years to implement the Directive, which will be explored in greater detail during chapter four. Ascertaining the number of workers the Directive will affect has become a key aim of the UK government, leading to the analysis of several set of data. One such dataset is called the labour force survey, which consists of information gathered from over 120,000 individuals representing approximately 55,000 households throughout Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The level of detail present within the survey makes it a useful tool in exploring the demographics of the temporary agency worker group, and data collected between January and March of 2009 (LFS, 2009) will now be considered further.

After analysing data gathered from the sample of over 45,000 individuals whom resided in some form of employment, the survey concluded that 5.31% of the UK workforce possessed a temporary form of contract with their employer. The LFS further divided temporary workers into five categories: 'Seasonal work', 'Contract for fixed period, fixed task', 'Agency temping', 'Casual work', and 'Not permanent in some other way'. After drawing these distinctions, analysis indicated that the 'Agency temping' category made up 17.77% of temporary workers in the UK, and approximately 0.94% of the UK workforce in total. Figure 1 below illustrates the distribution of each temporary worker category. Fixed-term contractors are likely to have a contract of employment limited to a pre-determined period of time, casual workers are employed by an organisation for a short period of time, and seasonal workers are used to adhere to seasonal peaks in demand (Biggs, 2006).

Figure 2.2. The Distribution of Types of Temporary Worker in the UK (LFS, 2009)



As well as providing data that established the numbers and percentages of agency workers employed in the UK, the LFS incorporated over 600 variables for all workers that respond, allowing for a series of comparisons that can be drawn between different worker groups. The mean age of agency workers was reported at 36.64, compared to a mean age of 41.09 for permanent workers. A variable relating to the future intentions of the respondent was also included in the survey. Of the agency workers that took part in the survey, 25.93% stated that they were looking for a new job to replace their present job, compared to 4.45% of permanent workers and almost double the 12.79% of seasonal workers, who in this instance represented the temporary category with the second highest percentage of workers who reported a desire for a new job.

In order to gain further clarification on the future intentions of survey respondents, the LFS specified nine potential reasons for looking for a new job, and whilst the respondents from the permanent category of workers recorded a fairly even distribution of motives, 44.14% of agency worker respondents to the question stated that the present job may come to an end, and 25.23% stated that the present job was undertaken to fill time before finding another job. Employees that took part in the LFS also recorded the amount of time that they had resided with their current employer. Of the agency workers that took part in the survey, 20.79% had been with

their employers for less than 3 months, 21.03% reported between three and six months, and 20.79% between six and twelve months. In comparison, the reported numbers of permanent workers for these periods of time was 1.92%, 4.12%, and 7.13% respectively.

Despite providing extensive information on its respondents, cross-survey comparisons have led to claims that the figure of 200-250,000 agency workers indicated by the labour force survey represents a significant underestimation of the number of individuals employed in this temporary worker category (Biggs, 2006). One such claim was made in a memorandum by the department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), which compared the LFS estimate with that of the REC census, which gave an estimate of 1.1 million agency workers in 2006, and a BIS Survey of Recruitment Agencies (SORA), which estimated approximately 1.5 million in 2007 (BIS, 2010). From the same sources, there were an estimated 16,000 recruitment sites (i.e. branches and offices), and whilst many of these included large and well known companies, just under 60% of this total consisted of small single site agency businesses with between one and five employees who matched agency workers with assignments (BERR, 2008a).

Several explanations could be put forward for these statistical discrepancies. Conflicting reports over the numbers of agency workers can often be attributed to fluctuations resulting from higher turnover rates compared with permanent workers and varying levels in demand for the work e.g. students seeking temporary employment during the summer months. The SORA reported similar difficulties stemming from high turnover and flexibility, stating that a significant number of cases cited in the survey lasted less than a week, and in some cases, just fifteen minutes (BERR, 2008a). Druker and Stanworth (2001) outlined another reason for statistical discrepancies in agency worker numbers, stating that in any one week, individual agency workers may reside on the books of multiple agencies, and may even be placed into work by more than one agency. After drawing comparisons between the three main surveys of agency worker numbers, the BIS (2010) report attributed the contrasting conclusions to three main points. Firstly, the SORA and REC totals were based upon 'snapshot' surveys of recruitment businesses that were asked how many agency workers were on temporary assignment in a given time period. Secondly, agency workers represented a small proportion of workers, making it harder for a household survey like the LFS to find them. The self-reported format of the LFS was cited as the third potential cause of the inaccurate reports, as respondents may incorrectly class themselves as an alternative temporary worker

category, or even permanent (BIS, 2010). Such difficulties suggest that accurately ascertaining agency worker numbers will always prove problematic (Biggs, 2006).

2.5. The International Differences of Agency Worker Employment

Other research has studied this form of employment in several other countries. Forde and Slater (2006) studied the patterns of agency working, and temporary working more generally, and found a considerable variation between countries. After completing their analysis, it was stated that: “The proportion of employees working on a temporary basis is low in the USA and the UK, especially in comparison with many European and other OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] countries.” (Forde & Slater, 2006; p. 143). Of these European countries, Spain undoubtedly stands out, as over one third of the Spanish workforce during the decade of the 1990s consisted of temporary workers (Amuedo-Dorantes & Serrano-Padial, 2002). Research into national variations typically points to the differing legal guidelines that temporary worker utilisation must adhere to in each respective country. Prior to the agreed adoption of the Agency Workers Directive (discussed in greater detail in chapter four), levels of agency worker protection varied significantly from country to country, and previous research has taken steps to draw out these comparisons.

In their symposium on temporary employment growth, Booth, Dolado, and Frank (2002a) reviewed evidence from four EU countries with varying patterns of temporary employment utilisation. By comparing research from Britain, France, Sweden, and Spain, Booth et al (2002a) argued that employment protection legislation significantly impacted upon the levels of temporary worker utilisation in the country’s workforce. Booth et al (2002a, p. 181) attributed the relatively low and stable levels of temporary worker usage in Britain to comparatively weak employment protection that permitted an: “...essentially unregulated market.”. The proportions of workforces in Sweden and France, which had maintained employment protection at about the average levels in Europe for the fifteen years prior to the study, contained approximately double those of Britain, whilst Spain, with some of the strongest employment protection restrictions and by far the largest percentage of temporary labour, represented the extreme opposite of Britain (Booth et al, 2002a). The contrasting approach to temporary worker utilisation between EU countries is a potential indication that the adoption of the Agency Workers Directive may result in significant shifts in employee utilisation. However, caution regarding these claims must be exercised, as Booth et al’s (2002a) study did not identify the

specific worker categories incorporated under the 'umbrella' term of temporary worker.

Further work done on the factors that affect the use of agency workers and how they differ between countries has also reported a strong relationship between the degree of temporary employment and the strictness of employment legislation (Forde & Slater, 2006). Such patterns refer to all types of temporary work, including fixed-term contract staff, although the specific area of agency work has seen a rapid expansion across many industrialised countries (Forde & Slater, 2006). Whilst employment legislation can prove a key factor in the use of temporary agency labour at a national level, the financial implications that accompany this form of worker utilisation can often prove highly influential, and these implications will now be discussed.

2.6. Financial Implications

The triangular nature of employment associated with agency workers can often translate into financial implications at an individual and organisational level, and may be influential for the resulting experiences of agency workers in their assignments. Issues have arisen that relate to the wages received by agency workers (e.g. Forde & Slater, 2005; Von Hippel, Mangum, Greenberger, Heneman & Skoglund, 1997), and the costs for the third party employers (e.g. Tregaskis, 1997), although the short-term financial cost of utilising agency workers is not the only economic factor that organisations have to consider. These factors affect agency workers, temporary employment agencies, and third party employers, and will now be discussed.

2.6.1. Temporary Employment Agencies

The Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC), which is the main trade association for temporary agency workers whose members account for 67% of the industry (Arrowsmith, 2006), have outlined some of the major financial benefits for temporary employment agencies. The industry turnover of UK employment agencies was £19.7 billion in 2009/10, a 12.4% decrease on the £22 billion recorded the previous year. Permanent placements turnover fell by 27.6% to £1.9 billion, and temporary and contract turnover dropped 10.4% to £17.8 billion (REC, 2011). Concerns over agency worker pay have been voiced by research highlighting the wage gap between permanent workers and agency workers, which has been reported at 22%, and similar figures can be found for other forms of temporary work,

excluding fixed-term contractors, who earned a larger amount on average than permanent workers (Forde & Slater, 2005). Von Hippel et al (1997) also reported Forde and Slater's (2005) finding, stating that temporary workers typically did not receive the same wages as permanent employees carrying out the same work.

2.6.2. Agency Workers

Recorded reactions from agency workers vary in relation to the reportedly poor wages afforded to them from temporary employment agencies. Golden and Appelbaum (1992) reported non-wage costs like health insurance, pension contributions, and paid time-off to be much lower for US-based temporary workers, and in the UK Forde and Slater (2006) reported that agency workers were less satisfied with pay compared to permanent members of staff. Forde and Slater (2006) also reported a 22% wage gap, as stated earlier. Concerns over agency worker pay have been voiced by research claiming that: "Agency jobs are paid, on average, less than permanent jobs, even after controlling for a range of personal and job characteristics, indicating that relative pay is a real problem." (Forde & Slater, 2005; p. 266). The disparity between agency workers and their permanent counterparts in relation to wage has been attributed to the actions of temporary employment agencies who, in order to increase the chances of securing client organisations, will try to keep wages for their workers as low as possible in what is reportedly a competitive trade (Druker & Stanworth, 2004).

From the point of view of third party employers, Tregaskis (1997) reported that the greater saving was gained as a result of not having to give non-permanent employees the same, if any, fringe benefits, such as pension contributions or sick benefits. After using Spanish data from the European Community Household Panel, research by Amuedo-Dorantes and Serrano-Padial (2002) also found that Spanish temporary workers earned significantly less than their permanent counterparts, although individuals on longer-term temporary contracts (i.e. a year or more) experienced greater wage growth and better future employment prospects.

Disparities between research findings are a recurring theme in temporary employment, and agency worker treatment is no exception. A survey of 2,500 temporary workers distributed by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation revealed that the majority of respondents did not feel under-paid or undervalued, despite union claims to the contrary (Thomas & Berry, 2005). Gareth Osborne, the then REC managing director, responded negatively to trade union calls for implementation of the Agency Workers Directive, stating that a change in law would

damage temps' prospects by restricting their flexibility. Osbourne went on to state that: "Temporary workers are sick of being patronised and portrayed as systematically under-valued and under-paid... The first-hand accounts we have confirm that flexible working is increasingly valued" (Thomas & Berry, 2005; p. 2). Claims made with regard to flexibility are often central to discussions relating to agency work, and will be scrutinised in far greater depth in chapter four. The contradictory perspectives outlined above are common in research linked to temporary workers, and much of this has been attributed to the various forms that temporary work can take (Biggs, Burchell, & Millmore, 2006) and the various industries that employ temporary workers (CIETT, 2000). These concerns highlight how generalisations between different worker groups can prove problematic, and this is an issue that the current thesis will take into account. Despite several forms of work falling under the bracket of 'temporary', the triangular contract of employment is an exclusive characteristic of the agency worker category. These unique working arrangements have been highlighted as a source of difficulty that will be explored in greater detail throughout the thesis.

2.6.3. Third Party Employers

As already stated, employing agency workers can prove costly for third party employers. After carrying out research into organisations that utilise non-permanent workers from the UK, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland, Tregaskis (1997) described how a greater number of organisations using low levels of non-permanent workers reported that they made a profit, whilst high users of temporary workers reported that they had not. However, the fees charged by temporary employment agencies and the wages given to agency workers are not the only financial implications that apply for organisations when incorporating agency workers. Research by Von Hippel et al (1997) outlined one of the key, financially based, factors that a company must consider when deciding whether to take on temporary staff, claiming that the use of temporary workers may represent a 'make' or 'buy' decision, in which training an employee in requisite skills is to 'make', and hiring a worker who already possesses such skills is to 'buy'. This decision essentially boils down to a balance between speed and cost. Whilst the acquisition of a skilled temporary worker translates into an immediate boost in skills and numbers for the company, short-term costs can be relatively high in comparison, and temporary worker arrangements typically lack the assurances of on-going and open-ended tenure that are often more prominent in permanent working arrangements.

Feldman, Doeringhaus, and Turnley (1994) reported similar findings, claiming temporary employees took pressure off supervisors in relation to recruitment, training, and required social control, including decisions regarding promotion, pay-increases, and layoffs. Biggs et al (2006) also cited a reduction in recruitment costs as a clear reason for agency worker utilisation. Forde and Slater (2005) further stated that an organisation may want to assess an individual's suitability for a full-time position whilst they were on a non-permanent agency contract, as this would prove less costly than employing them on probationary terms. Kalleberg (2000) reported that organisations using temporary employees would often staff minimally and then add temporary employees on an "as-need basis", and that temporary help agencies were often treated as an extension of client firms' human resources departments.

Research in Australia carried out by Hall (2006) found evidence for several of the motives outlined above. Findings suggested that the clients of temporary employment agencies saved on recruitment, selection, induction, and training and development costs by benefiting from the allegedly greater efficiency of agencies in sourcing and placing labour. Research by Druker and Stanworth (2001) focussed on temporary employment agencies and third party employers, and reported that traditional reasons (e.g. covering staff who are ill, absent, or on maternity leave) accounted for over 68% of the third party employer responses. Other reasons that made up the remaining 32% of the study's 183 postal responses included access to scarce skills, strategic reasons (e.g. shift to external provider, outsourcing), probation (e.g. 'temp' to 'perm'), access to skill used intermittently, and avoidance of pre-existing permanent staff insecurity. Rogers (2000) included the reduction in benefit costs and unemployment compensation claims, as well as union avoidance, as some of the key reasons employers seek the services of agency staff.

Recruitment practices like these can cut long-term costs for organisations, but could also prove beneficial at an individual level, as agency work may expose more workers to more firms, achieving additional and better job matches (Storrie, 2002). It could certainly be argued that these benefits are even more important in relation to the difficult economic climate currently being experienced, as agencies may achieve success in re-integrating the growing pool of unemployed workers into a shrinking labour market. However, individuals' reliance upon agency work for the obtainment of full-time employment can prove problematic. In their longitudinal study into temporary contracts and work strain, the temporary workers in Parker, Griffin, Sprigg, and Wall's (2002) sample who had been promised a permanent contract

after six months were still awaiting this offer, despite employment tenure with the company approaching two years. As well as the reduction in recruitment costs, one of the underlying motives for this practice could be that the company considered its own recruitment and screening practices to be flawed, or at least inferior when compared to the selection processes of employment agencies that specialise in recruitment.

Research has also highlighted several more negative factors associated with the hiring of agency staff. Agency workers will often lack knowledge of organisations' culture and methods of working. There is also additional time needed for internal workers to train the agency workers to do the job (Hesselink & Vuuren, 1999). Other research into the reported high costs of agency worker usage has also criticised the employment agencies behind the supply of agency workers. Research by Druker and Stanworth (2001) claimed that whilst organisations may save in relation to sick pay, pensions, public holidays, and reduced responsibility in employment law, these savings may be offset by the ongoing commission charges of the employment agency. Forde and Slater (2006) argued in a similar vein that the perceived expense of agency worker usage reported by third party employers is more of a reflection of the abilities of agencies to maintain healthy mark-ups on the fees charged for hiring-out agency staff, rather than high levels of pay given to agency workers. If organisations believe this to be the case, relations with temporary employment agencies may suffer, yet research has very rarely explored the relationship between temporary employment agencies and the organisations they provide workers for.

2.7. Summary and Conclusions

The aim of the current chapter has been to identify and introduce the temporary category labelled agency workers, and place them in the context of the UK labour market. The defining characteristic of this group is the unique triangular contract that forms the basis of the group's relationship with their two employers, and this has been frequently cited as a major contributor to the insecurity associated with agency employment. Legal action over access to employee rights has led to court cases that have called into question agency workers' very status as employees. Many individuals may not be aware of the precariousness of their employment situation, yet workers have suffered consequences from this lack of classification in the past. The uncertain nature of agency employment is only exacerbated during times of economic fluctuation, as de Gilder's (2003) findings demonstrate. The ease of dismissal makes agency workers an attractive option for companies experiencing

uncertain demands, as organisations would encounter comparatively fewer penalties for releasing the agency staff from their workforce as a result of the contract.

After identifying the temporary category of agency workers, the chapter went on to place them in the context of the UK labour market. This was achieved by considering data from the REC census, the BIS Survey of Recruitment Agencies (SORA), and most notably, the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The discrepancies that exist between each dataset are an indication of the difficulty caused by the sporadic and varying 'assignment-based' nature of agency employment. The LFS encountered the greatest difficulty when assessing agency worker numbers due to the cyclical and short-term nature of their employment, but was also able to provide some further information on their future intentions with the industry. Despite contrasting reports, information from quantitative data sources like the LFS, SORA, and REC census help build a useful picture of the UK agency employment industry, most notably in relation to workers' numbers, assignment lengths, and desire to gain alternative employment.

The chapter continued by reviewing the financial implications of agency worker employment. The UK agency employment industry turned over £19.7 billion during 2009/10 (REC, 2011), but when viewed from an individual perspective, concerns have arisen regarding the pay afforded to agency workers. The shorter tenures and increased flexibility associated with agency employment is typically cited as a justification for these lower levels of pay, yet research has argued that individual agency workers are less satisfied with the wages they receive from their temporary employment agencies (e.g. Forde & Slater, 2006). For companies, the increased short-term costs of employing agency staff may be offset by the reduced obligations inherent within the contract. Immediate cover for staff absence, sporadic access to particular skills, a reduced need to carry out training, and access to a pool of potentially permanent staff may ensure that the decision to employ these workers becomes far less straightforward.

Providing fast access to a collection of workers can be financially vital to the success of the temporary employment agency, and may even result in a strong business relationship building between the temporary employment agency and the client company. The following chapter will begin by exploring the various relationships that exist between the key groups, from the temporary employment

agency and the third party employer, to the pre-existing permanent workers and their reaction to the company's decision to utilise agency staff.

3. The Inter-Relationships and Future Employment Prospects in the Temporary Employment Industry

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the temporary category of workers known as agency workers, before placing them in the UK workforce context and discussing the financial implications of their utilisation for each of the main parties involved. The current chapter also adopts a multiple perspective-based approach to assess the relationships that result from a company's decision to utilise agency staff.

Understanding the varying interactions resulting from the agency employment industry is a significant objective of the thesis, and the current chapter begins by providing a diagrammatical representation of the industry, before studying some of the relationships in greater detail.

The first of these relationships exists between the temporary employment agency and the third party employer, and the chapter continues by exploring the effects of this relationship for the agency workers and considering the scarcity of research into the area. The diagrammatic representation also includes permanent workers, who would typically have little, if any, contact with the temporary employment agency, but may often work with agency counterparts on a regular basis. Increased focus has been placed by research upon permanent employee reaction to agency worker utilisation, and the resulting findings will be considered in relation to job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and job security. Possessing two sets of obligations can prove problematic for individual agency workers, and the section continues by exploring some of the difficulties individuals have experienced as a result. By exploring the multiple relationships interlocked within this form of employment, the thesis hopes to assess the levels of power and influence that each party in the industry holds, and evaluate the implications that result from this balance.

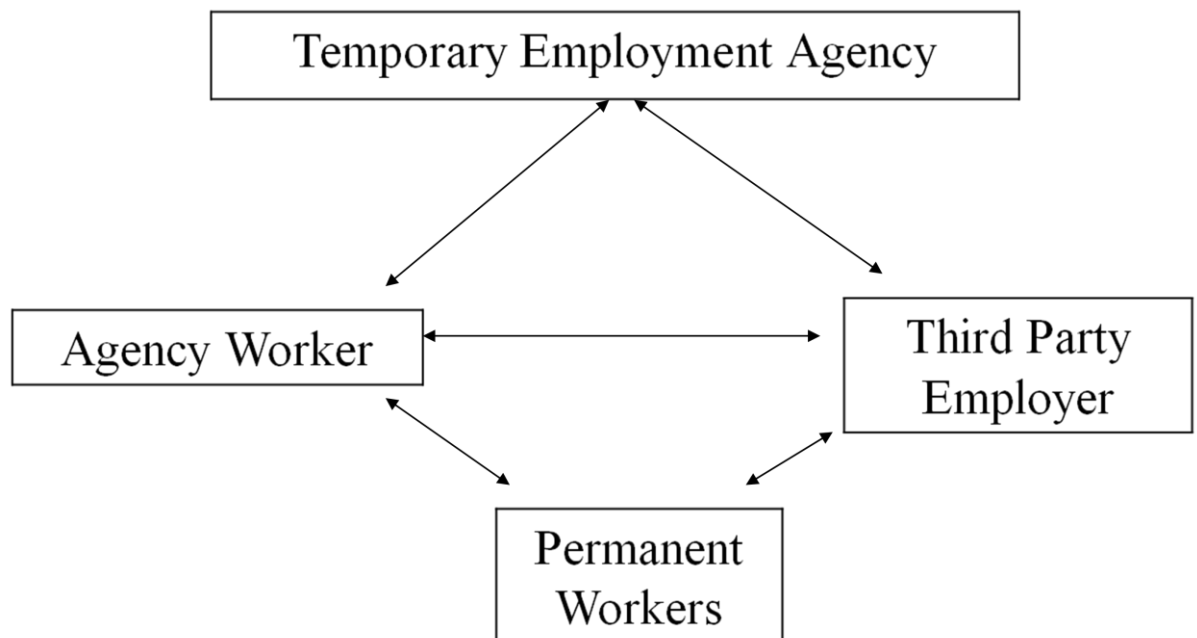
Understanding the degree of aid that the agency employment industry can provide potentially vulnerable prospective employees represents a strong motive of the thesis. The chapter will explore the potential avenues of support, identified by research, that temporary employment agencies may be able to provide individuals. These findings are divided into the role of the agency employment industry in the

global recession, the likelihood of securing individual transition from agency to permanent employment, and the extent of potentially beneficial training inherent in agency working assignments. The chapter will conclude by summarising the findings of previous research, before providing a bridge to the following chapter.

3.2. The Relations of the Temporary Employment Industry

The current chapter will begin by considering the multiple perspectives involved in the employment of agency workers. The temporary employment agency is tasked with connecting agency workers with prospective organisations, and will typically maintain a professional relationship with both throughout the assignment. Whilst permanent employees are unlikely to interact with the temporary employment agency, they will often work alongside, or manage, the agency workers that their company employs, making them a potentially influential aspect of agency workers' employment (Pearce, 1993). Figure 3.1. illustrates the relationships that can result from a third party employer's decision to utilise agency workers in their company.

Figure 3.1. The Interactions of the Agency Employment Industry



As stated by Druker and Stanworth (2004) in the previous chapter, six sets of mutual expectations result from the individual, third party employer, and temporary employment agency before the effect of permanent workers is even considered. The third party employer will typically instigate the employment interactions outlined in the figure above by approaching the temporary employment agency, and the resulting relationship that forms between the two will now be explored.

3.2.1. The Temporary Employment Agency and Third Party Employer Relationship

Developing strong relationships with third party employers can be highly beneficial for temporary employment agencies, most notably through the financial rewards that result from fulfilling a steady stream of assignments. The benefits can also extend to the third party employer, who can increase their company's flexibility by accessing and incorporating agency staff into their workforce. Whilst a positive relationship can prove mutually beneficial for each party, difficulties may also arise. Rogers (2000) highlighted the main conflict in this relationship in the US, observing that temporary employment agencies possessed an interest in placing each worker on assignment for as many hours as possible. The agency's profit typically depends upon a 'mark up' of the individual agency worker's hourly rate during the time spent with the third party employer, who are in turn trying to extract the maximum labour power from each worker in order to shorten the number of hours that they are billed (Rogers, 2000).

However, the quality of the working relationship that exists between the temporary employment agency and the third party employer can also have repercussions for the individual agency workers assigned to the user company. As Rogers (2000) pointed out: "Clients, not workers, pay the temporary agency, and therefore, the loss of a client poses more of a threat to the success of the agency than the loss of a single, expendable temporary worker." (Rogers, 2000; p. 124). At face value, the employment agency's reliance upon the third party employer's custom will place priority upon the requirements and general satisfaction of the third party employer, ensuring that the needs of the agency workers on their books come second to those of the client. In the context of the current economic climate, the importance of a reliable source of income is greater than ever, and when coupled with a surplus of workers, the degree of influence client companies can exert over the other parties involved in agency worker utilisation is potentially greater than ever. Understanding the implications of this perceived shift in control is therefore an important objective of the current thesis.

Research outlined in chapter two argued that a lack of protection for agency workers may exist due to their legal standing (Lavin, 2005), their vulnerability to economic fluctuation (de Gilder, 2003), and the quality of working conditions that they experience during assignments (Nienhüser & Matiaske, 2006). Often, these issues stem from reduced responsibility from the individual's two 'employers', as

agency workers may be regarded as employees of the agency or employees of the business using them. Despite these claims, guidelines outlined by the government aim to improve the experiences of agency workers, and these guidelines rely on the existence of an effective level of communication between the two organisations involved. These government guidelines state that the business and the agency have a shared duty to protect the health and safety of the agency worker. An agreement should therefore be reached over the practical arrangements for day-to-day supervision, and direction and control of the work that agency workers will be doing (Business Link, 2009).

The government guidelines also state that both organisations are legally obliged to consult their own workers about health and safety, and it is regarded as good practice for the agency to consult the user company's employees when the placement is predicted to be long term (Business Link, 2009). It is also the responsibility of the temporary employment agency to ensure that the user business has carried out an assessment, and that the findings have been collected and passed on to agency workers. If the user business does not volunteer the information needed, agencies may need to make a site visit to complete their own risk assessment. Temporary employment agencies must also make reasonable enquiries of agency workers about whether they are working elsewhere, and take steps to ensure that their weekly average of 48 working hours is not exceeded. Alternatively, the agency worker should be asked to make an agreement that the limit should not apply in their case (Business Link, 2009). If guidelines such as these are strictly followed by the agencies and their clients, it is reasonable to suggest the emergence of a professional relationship that goes beyond those that are typically formed between the client company and its customers. By incorporating multiple perspectives within the analysis, the thesis will be well placed to explore the establishment and maintenance of such a relationship.

3.2.2. Agency Workers and their Permanent Counterparts

Psychological enquiry has almost exclusively focussed upon the individual, and whilst agency workers typically represent the subject of this enquiry, permanent workers have also received attention from the agency employment literature. Research into the impact of agency worker utilisation on the pre-existing permanent workforce has reported mixed reaction. Torcka and Schyns' (2007) study described a positive example where supervisors stated that the additional value of agency workers' experience allowed them to contribute to continuous improvement, yet

findings from other studies have been less positive. Problems between worker groups have been linked to the triangular nature of employment experienced by agency workers (Forde & Slater, 2006), perceived reward inequalities existing within work environments heavily reliant upon temporary workers (Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993), and a greater reliance upon permanent staff resulting from the reduced organisation-specific knowledge possessed by agency workers (Pearce, 1993). Whilst many of these problems may represent a product of poor management, they are likely to contribute to a negative image of agency staff and increase tensions between different worker groups. Henson (1996) reported this very concern when claiming that office-based relationships were further damaged by stereotypes that labelled agency workers as less committed, less qualified, and less principled workers.

After exploring the potentially negative impact of agency staff on permanent employees, research by Rogers (2000) concluded that: "The introduction of temporary workers has the very real potential of creating uncertainty about jobs among the permanent workers and thus reducing solidarity among workers in general." (Rogers, 2000; p. 46). Another potential contributor towards poor relationships between agency and permanent workers is put forward by Henson (1996), who argued that: "Not only are temporaries atomized and isolated through high turnover rates, constantly fluctuating schedules, and shifting work sites but their identity management strategies are also ultimately individualistic, working against solidarity." (Henson, 1996; p. 171). Previous research has often investigated the relationship between agency and permanent staff by applying psychological concepts and variables onto these two distinct worker groups, and the most popular of these can be broadly divided into job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and job security.

Research into the impact of agency working on permanent worker perceptions of job satisfaction has reported some interesting findings. In their investigation into agency workers and the effect they can have on permanent workers in relation to job satisfaction, Biggs, Senior, and Swailes (2002) found that permanent staff who did not work with agency workers reported significantly higher levels of job satisfaction compared to permanent staff that did. In the US, Porter (1995, as cited in Van Dyne & Ang, 1998) reported similar findings for hospital staff, as the absence of general temporary workers was positively associated with the levels of job satisfaction for the permanent members of staff. These findings indicate that the

presence of agency workers may result in a potentially detrimental effect upon the levels of job satisfaction present in the permanent workforce.

The variable of organisational commitment has received arguably the greatest level of focus from research into the reactions of permanent employees, and as with job satisfaction, findings have been mixed. One of the most frequently cited causes of reduced organisational commitment associated with agency worker integration has been the third party employer's method of utilisation. Research by Davis-Blake and Uzzi (1993) highlighted the sample company's externalisation of the workload as a significant antecedent of lower levels of organisational commitment in permanent workers. This assertion was based upon the argument that heavy externalisation could destabilise the core workforce, as reliance upon 'non-company' staff could lead permanent workers to question their firm's commitment to their continued employment. Similar concerns were raised by Kuvaas and Dysvik (2007), who warned that extensive or increasing use of temporary employees driven by short-term and cost-driven human resource strategy may negatively affect the social climate of the organisation, as well as the motivation and commitment of its permanent staff.

When considering these findings as possible antecedents, the form that agency worker utilisation takes could be viewed as potentially damaging to the permanent staff's perceptions of organisational commitment, and research findings have supported this argument. A study by Biggs and Swailes (2006) incorporated a research design that was able to account for agency worker influence by dividing permanent workers into those that worked with agency staff and those that did not. Findings indicated that the independent permanent group possessed significantly higher levels of organisational commitment than the sample of agency staff, and the permanent employees they worked alongside.

A comparable negative influence was also indicated in a study by Davis-Blake, Broschak, and George (2003), who analysed data collected in two 1991 US national surveys: the General Social Survey (GSS), and the 'National Organizations Survey' (NOS). Analysis indicated that an organisation's use of general temporary workers led to a reduction in loyalty, and an increase in the desire of permanent staff to leave the organisation. One explanation forwarded by Davis-Blake et al (2003) was the permanent worker reaction to the increased responsibility they possessed when supervising temporary staff. Whilst some permanent workers may be happy with the greater level of responsibility that the organisation has decided to place on their

shoulders, others may view it merely as extra work. If this greater workload is not coupled with an appropriate reward like a pay rise, promotion, increased autonomy, or additional praise, then the increased level of responsibility may damage relations with the agency workers placed under their care, the supervisors that bestowed the responsibility, and the organisation for failing to provide the perceived level of appropriate reward. Although Davis-Blake et al (2003) did not specify which temporary worker category had contributed to the negative feelings of the workforce, they did note that the organisation's use of fixed-term contract workers did not have the same effect. The short-term nature of agency working arrangements also increases the likelihood that these workers would frequently require introductory training, suggesting that Davis-Blake et al's (2003) findings are at least partially transferable to this temporary worker category.

When considering the findings outlined above, the form that agency worker utilisation can take appears to be significant to the reaction of permanent employees. Research by Bishop, Goldsby, and Neck (2001) made this variable the focus of their study by comparing levels of organisational commitment in permanent workers from two companies; one that used temporary workers to shield its permanent workforce from layoffs (shield), and one that made layoff decisions with no regard to worker status (layoff). The findings of the study indicated that levels of organisational commitment in the 'shield' company's permanent workforce were higher than those in the 'lay-off' organisation. Bishop et al (2001) attributed this difference to the pattern of job losses resulting from market fluctuation, as the 'buffer' effect created by temporary workers at the 'shield' company was perceived to increase feelings of organisational commitment for the permanent workers of the organisation. Research into the effects of agency worker utilisation on the permanent workforce has forwarded several conflicting findings, but Bishop et al's (2001) study indicates that the perceptions permanent employees attribute to their company's employment practices may prove more influential than the organisation's actual intentions.

Similar research by Parker, Griffin, Sprigg, and Wall (2002) also focussed upon a large group of individuals employed on temporary contracts. These workers had been put in place to buffer the permanent staff from unpredictable market demands, observing that having a 'peripheral' temporary workforce may in fact be seen as essential for achieving a mutual investment relationship with the 'core' permanent workforce. Utilising agency workers in this manner may undoubtedly prove beneficial for permanent workers, but raises several questions, including whether

agency workers understand and appreciate the potential pitfalls of their positions, how confident firms are of fulfilling their promises of employment to agency staff, and whether the temporary employment agencies possess knowledge of any questionable recruitment arrangements. If responses to these questions indicate dubious employment practices, such practices could potentially be labelled 'unethical', as ill-informed and unsuspecting agency workers may be integrated into a company under false pretences, and with comparatively little support.

Research has shown that, as with organisational commitment, a firm's policy for the utilisation of agency staff could have implications for the levels of job security experienced by the pre-existing permanent workers of an organisation. The aforementioned study by Biggs et al (2002) found that permanent staff working with agency workers reported reduced levels of job satisfaction compared with permanent workers who did not work with agency workers, and this deficit was repeated when the variable of job security was applied to the sample. This suggests that an organisation's decision to employ agency workers may have a negative impact upon the perceptions of security for permanent members of staff, who may have interpreted their company's reluctance to recruit staff on permanent terms as a sign of future uncertainty for the company or the external market. A similar effect was reported in research by Pearce (1993), whose interviews with permanent employees indicated that they perceived the utilisation of general temporary staff as a threat to their jobs. As discussed in the following chapter, organisations often seek flexible ways of working to match company output with external market fluctuation. If permanent employees associate agency worker usage with market fluctuations that are outside of their control, a company's decision to employ agency staff may indirectly induce feelings of insecurity among the pre-existing workforce.

3.2.3. Agency Workers and their Employers

As the previous chapter demonstrated, an agency worker's contract is integral to many of their experiences of employment, and these were explored in relation to the legal protection, vulnerability, and working conditions. This chapter will continue by viewing the working relationships from the perspective of the individual in order to help build up a picture of agency working and the variety of perspectives it incorporates. When viewing their position in the employment triangle, Rogers (2000) revealed that many of the agency workers interviewed noted it was like having two bosses to satisfy. An initial assessment of an individual agency worker's employment situation could conclude that possessing two employers may provide

the individual with extra support. Conversely, the reduced obligations within the agency worker contract could make individuals more vulnerable than their permanent counterparts, and that possessing two employers may even prove detrimental to an agency worker's employment experiences.

Although the contractual relationship experienced by agency workers has received considerable attention in the literature, a lack of protection has also been associated with issues other than the triangular contract of employment. A report into agency working by the TUC described the levels of vulnerability often experienced by UK agency workers, who are more likely to be young, from an ethnic minority background, and slightly less qualified than the overall workforce (TUC, 2007b). The report also outlined findings from a previous TUC report in 2005 which revealed many instances of agency workers who failed to receive minimum wage (TUC, 2007a). This was caused by agencies that had claimed fees for benefits including meals, uniform, equipment, and transport, before deducting these costs from the minimum wage of the individual. A TUC report into UK agency working also received accounts of migrant agency workers, who often due to language difficulties and a lack of awareness of their rights, found themselves being forced to live in over-crowded, sub-standard accommodation, and were often charged exorbitant rates to do so (TUC, 2007b).

The TUC's Commission of Vulnerable Employment (CoVE, 2008) has also outlined anecdotal evidence of agency worker mistreatment in a report, which included several examples where individuals described negative and damaging experiences resulting from their agency worker status. In one example, an agency worker was denied training and had to pay for mandatory personal protective equipment with direct wage deductions. The report continued by describing how the former agency worker was required to turn up at 5a.m and wait to see if he would be selected for 'rounds' with the permanent workers. If not selected, he would have to wait until 8a.m in case needed. If he were not needed, he would be sent home without pay. He also claimed that agency workers were effectively barred from taking holidays, as doing so would result in them being put back in the selection queue (CoVE, 2008). In another reported account, an immigrant worker employed by an agency in the UK described supplied accommodation that was substandard, as well as no training, compulsory wage deductions, and threats from what the individual termed 'agency henchmen'. Counter arguments to these reports claim that they represent the experiences of a tiny minority of individuals, although the CoVE (2008) report

also alleges that a significant proportion of vulnerable work is not captured by official statistics.

Highlighting worker exploitation is a key objective of the TUC, but examples of agency worker mistreatment are not isolated to trade union reports. Disparity between worker groups has also been reported by Henson (1996) in relation to reward inequality. Permanent workers may hold reasonable expectations that increased effort at work may result in rewards that include pay-rises, bonuses, or promotion, yet Henson (1996, p. 84) argued that an agency worker's imposed self-discipline: "... largely benefits the temporary agency and the client company rather than the worker, particularly since the loyalty of temporary workers is rarely rewarded with higher wages, real stability, or better working conditions.". Rogers (2000) asserted similar sentiments relating to reward inequality, claiming that the increased effort of agency employees who exceeded expectations resulted in clients getting more for their money and temporary employment agencies getting better public relations, yet the agency worker may only be awarded with the small chance of receiving a slightly better opportunity for future assignments.

Further anecdotal evidence of mistreatment was reported during an interview in Henson's (1996) study, in which an agency worker in a clerical role was told by a client company supervisor to pick up some cigarettes and clean an office. After refusing and requesting another assignment, the participant reported the subsequent feeling of punishment, as assignments were not as forthcoming from the agency. The actions of the agency could be considered an alternative form of control exclusive to the agency employment industry, as the ease of contract termination and flow of assignments undoubtedly favours the individual agency worker's two employers. Rogers (2000, p. 53) also found this to be the case, reporting that: "Those temporaries seen as cooperative and compliant receive assignments, and more often the coveted assignments, while 'problem' temporaries receive undesirable assignments or no work at all."

Henson (1996) noted how the fear of work deprivation and uncertain scheduling practices placed workers in a vulnerable, and at times manipulative, relationship with their temporary agencies and client supervisors. Henson's research went on to highlight how this fear could manifest itself in the behaviour of individuals. Participants of the study reported the need to observe a greater degree of tolerance in the face of racial and homophobic remarks due to a fear that voicing dissent may end in the loss of the assignment. The numbers of agency workers experiencing this

form of employment agency-induced punishment may be relatively low, but their mere existence may indirectly lead to a deeply ingrained anxiety within a far larger number of agency staff. It could be argued that psychological research is best placed to understand the implications of an agency worker's relationship with their supervisors, agencies, and permanent co-workers, as well as the impact of their unique triangular contract, and this will take place in chapters five and six.

Contrasting levels of treatment may begin and end with an individual's employment as an agency worker, although the effects of poorer treatment may prove to be longer term. Research by Biggs, Burchell, and Millmore (2006) into six third party employers found a discrepancy in the treatment demonstrated towards permanent and agency staff when the workers in question were accused of harassment. Three of the six organisations immediately suspended the accused agency worker, yet the accused permanent workers had all allegations investigated thoroughly before they were suspended (Biggs et al, 2006). This disparity in treatment represented an apparent act of discrimination committed by the organisation over an issue that should in no way relate to an individual's employment status, and may have proved a serious hindrance to the future employment prospects of the individuals in question.

3.3. The Societal Benefits of Agency Working

The level of unemployment has been a key concern throughout Europe for many years, and has risen to prominence in recent years with the onset of recession. The existence of a recession was confirmed by official government figures when the widely accepted definition of recession, i.e. two consecutive quarters of negative economic growth, was met after a fall in gross domestic product of 1.5% in the final three months of 2008 (BBC, 2009c). Unemployment has become a major concern in the UK as a result of the financial crisis. In October 2008, Oxford Economics (2008) predicted that over 100,000 UK jobs would be lost over the next three years in the financial services sector alone, and the number of labour force survey respondents reporting their economic activity as 'unemployed' more than doubled in the first quarter of 2009 when compared with 2005 reports. At the start of 2009, 1.92 million people were out of work, amid a severely depressed housing market and weak retail sales (BBC, 2009c). Research has argued that temporary agency working can provide several benefits to the UK workforce, suggesting that the agency employment industry may have a potentially positive impact in the current climate at

a societal level. These claims represent a central focus of the thesis, and will now be explored further.

3.3.1. The Role of the Agency Employment Industry in the Global Recession

In previous years, prolonged recession has been linked with an increased number of temporary work arrangements, with Japan cited as one example (Tan & Tan, 2002). The potential benefits of agency employment in times of financial difficulty have been recognised for many years, most notably in a report commissioned by the International Confederation of Private Employment Agencies (CIETT) over a decade ago. The sharp increase in redundancies and layoffs has exacerbated problems relating to unemployment that have been plaguing Europe for several decades. In Europe during the 1990s, high levels of unemployment existed alongside significant numbers of job vacancies, suggesting that Europe has struggled to effectively match workers with jobs (CIETT, 2000). Research described the level of interaction between supply and demand for workers in Europe as far from perfect, and that the EU labour market faced three particular challenges that included reducing levels of unemployment, meeting individuals' growing demand for flexibility, and meeting companies' need for flexibility in the supply and deployment of workers (CIETT, 2000). The report concluded that private employment agencies possessed the capacity to make a significant contribution to the social and economic fabric of Europe, and that evolution of the industry can greatly increase this contribution in years to come.

The positive influence of the agency employment industry at a macroeconomic level has been forwarded, yet Storrie (2002) noted that very little empirical research has considered the topic. A study by Katz and Krueger (1999) into the decline of US unemployment throughout the 1990's indicated that the temporary help sector may have played a major role in the decline, but added that their results were highly speculative. The research by CIETT (2000) argued that temporary employment agencies should play a role in increasing the number of individuals in employment by creating opportunities for specific groups, including young people, the long-term unemployed, women, and elderly people. Druker and Stanworth (2004) also outlined opportunities for a variety of groups, as their agency worker sample included first-time jobbers, long-haul travellers, individuals experiencing career transitions, and people who had experienced redundancy or early retirement. Other research has also outlined opportunities for working mothers, college students, and

individuals who had recently relocated (Feldman, Doeringhaus & Turnley, 1994), and individuals who are experiencing, or have experienced, mental health problems (Biggs, Tyson, Macdonald, & Hovey, 2010). Studies like these highlight the variety of individuals that have benefitted from agency working, suggesting that the agency employment industry represents an accessible avenue into employment.

Research into this provision of working opportunities suggests that individuals who would normally encounter difficulties in finding work may have their paths to employment streamlined by the efforts of temporary employment agencies, with resulting financial benefits at an individual level, as well as a societal one. The report by CIETT (2000) argued that, from a social point of view, many workers express a preference for agency work, as it allows quick access to employment for individuals who often considered themselves outsiders to the labour market, with many finding long-term jobs as a result. From an economic point of view, private employment agencies meet companies' flexibility needs by supplying workers to deal with temporary variations in output for a workforce (CIETT, 2000). The origin of this research must be considered in light of these claims, as they result from a report commissioned by the International Confederation of Private Employment Agencies.

The financial implications of agency employment are clearly prominent in the decisions of organisations and employees involved in the industry, yet for some individuals, agency employment is seen as a way of benefiting their future career prospects. At first glance, the opportunity to accrue experience may seem a wholly positive one, yet Rogers' (2000, p. 116) research found evidence that: "...many temporaries go so far as to hide their temporary employment experience from potential permanent employers by rewriting their résumés...". When assessing the impact that temporary agency employment can have upon individuals in relation to their career development, two main topics arise: transition from temporary to permanent employment, and the degree of training that agency workers receive whilst on assignment. In the current economic climate, these benefits adopt an increased significance at a societal level, as redundancies have become an increasingly common threat to employees throughout the UK workforce.

3.3.2. Individual Transition from Agency to Permanent Employment

As stated earlier, securing a potential transition from a temporary to a permanent position, either in the specific organisation or industry as a whole, can be a strong motivational factor in an individual's decision to pursue employment as an agency

worker. This was the case in Hesselink and Vuuren's (1999) survey on Dutch 'flexiworkers', which comprised of individuals from several temporary worker subsections, with around twenty-three per cent employed by temporary employment agencies. Despite findings which included a large portion of workers reporting a preference for the flexibility that their temporary roles offered in the present and future, the majority of workers stated a preference for a permanent job in the future (Hesselink & Vuuren, 1999).

After analysing data from the Spanish labour force survey between the years 1995-96, Amuedo-Dorantes (2000) investigated the success general temporary employees experienced when trying to become permanent employees. After defining transitional temporary jobs as "... those temporary positions that are followed by a permanent work arrangement" (Amuedo-Dorantes, 2000; p. 314), labour market transition rates were compared using labour force status data between the years 1995 and 1996. Of the individuals working in temporary positions in 1995, 61.9% still resided in temporary positions, whilst only 11.62% had attained permanent status. Of the remaining workers, 17.45% were unemployed, 2.46% were in 'other occupation', and 6.57% were out of the labour force altogether. Amuedo-Dorantes (2000) concluded that temporary employment is more likely to become a trap than a bridge to permanent status, and that spells in temporary work are unlikely to end in permanent jobs regardless of workers' tenure. The context of these findings must be considered, as the Spanish workforce contains a significantly higher distribution of temporary workers in comparison to that of the UK. However, research into the UK labour force survey by Forde and Slater (2005) only reported limited support for the notion that temporary employment agencies may be used as a stepping stone to permanent employment.

Even when agency workers are offered jobs with client firms as a result of their efforts on assignment, the motive for taking the assignment could influence the worker's perception of the offer. Agency workers may pursue an assignment as a 'way-in' to a client firm, but may ultimately want any permanent transition to be into a position with greater power, pay, or control. Whilst this may occur on occasions, Rogers (2000, p. 38) commented that: "...among those temporary workers I interviewed who were offered permanent jobs, the jobs offered were almost exclusively the same as their temporary assignments".

From an organisational perspective, agency worker utilisation has been associated with reduced recruitment costs (Biggs et al, 2006), and the assessment of an

individual's suitability for a permanent role (Forde & Slater, 2005). Instances of temp-to-perm transition are likely to be limited by compensation clauses between the temporary employment agency and third party employer. Organisations may even choose to exclude agency workers from applying to permanent posts as a result. However, legislative changes designed to address these issues are outlined within the impending Agency Workers Directive, discussed in greater detail during the following chapter.

3.3.3. Training

Training has become an important aspect of organisational life, as it is necessary to keep abreast of rapid economic, organisational, and technological change (Millward, 2005). As a result, emphasising and implementing powerful training and development programmes is becoming more critical in order to accomplish organisational objectives and goals effectively and efficiently (Al-Emadi & Marquardt, 2007). Assessing the extent of training that agency workers receive can be difficult, and this difficulty becomes apparent when studying the labour force survey. When answering the variable 'job related training or education in the last four weeks', 59.09% of all agency workers responded 'yes', compared with 49.64% of all permanent workers. Initial inspection suggested that agency workers received a greater amount of training than permanent members of staff. It could be argued that basic levels of introductory training were given to agency staff to 'get them up to speed' with their immediate duties, and that higher levels training were less likely to occur unless deemed necessary by the third party employer. The frequency and need for introductory training is also likely to be greater, as agency worker turnover will typically exceed permanent worker levels. This represents a significant barrier for cross-sectional quantitative studies, as researchers encounter difficulty when assessing the extent to which agency worker training opportunities occur.

The decision to implement a training programme often depends upon the business advantages and financial results (Campbell, 1994), and the short-term tenures inherent in many agency worker assignments can make financial investment harder to justify. When coupled with the lack of contractual obligations between the employer and employee, there is little surprise when agency workers are excluded from higher cost and longer-term opportunities for training. Whilst fewer ties to the organisation may suit some agency workers, others looking to improve their long-term career prospects may be happy to forfeit this aspect of contractual freedom in exchange for increased access to potentially valuable employee training and

development schemes. Another potential barrier to assessing levels of agency worker training may stem from a company's reliance upon temporary labour, as they may be more likely to 'bring in' individuals trained in the requisite skills through using non-permanent contracts (Tregaskis, 1997). Practices such as these are commonplace in the UK, as there is no statutory obligation to provide agency workers with training (Arrowsmith, 2006).

Felstead and Gallie (2004) reported that both sides of the agency employment industry have raised concerns over the lack of training opportunities for agency staff, and that non-standard employees in general are relatively disadvantaged in terms of the skills they are called upon to exercise at work, the development opportunities available to them, and, in some cases, the security of their jobs. Work by Wiens-Tuers and Hill (2002) reported that agency workers typically received less training compared to their permanent counterparts, and after comparing several subsections of temporary workers to a permanent worker norm group, Aronsson, Gustafsson, and Dallner (2002) reported that the temporary workers received a substantially lower level of occupational training and education during paid work time over the previous year. Work by Tregaskis (1997) also reported that temporary worker training investment by organisations tended to be low, as employers considered it unlikely that they would receive long-term payback from the recipients. After researching the area of training in relation to agency workers, Wiens-Tuers and Hill (2002) argued that a disparity in treatment may manifest itself in reduced levels of organisational commitment among agency workers, especially if they witnessed their permanent counterparts in similar roles receiving more training.

Investment in training agency staff may be harder to justify, although research has indicated that benefits can still result. Tan and Tan (2002) argued that training agency workers would lead to benefits in the form of increased job satisfaction and job performance, which would in turn help establish a positive long-term relationship between the temporary employment agency and third party employer.

Characteristics of the agency worker category also suggest a potentially increased need for training. Analysis of the labour force survey indicated a lower average age for workers employed as agency staff, and research by Druker and Stanworth (2004) reported that agency work helped individuals in a variety of circumstances that included first-time jobbers, people experiencing a career transition, people who had been made redundant or had taken early retirement, individuals looking for permanent employment, and students and recent graduates. Individuals who have recently entered or re-entered the labour market could be considered more

vulnerable than experienced, long-term permanent employees, making them ideal candidates for development opportunities. Despite the potential benefits of providing training opportunities for agency staff, Wiens-Tuers and Hill (2002) concluded that a paucity of studies on the training of non-standard workers significantly contrasted with the large body of research on permanent workers.

3.4. Summary and Conclusions

The previous chapter defined agency workers and positioned them in the context of the UK labour market, and the current chapter continued by focussing upon the agency employment industry and the various interactions it incorporates. The chapter began by highlighting an area seldom looked at in previous research: the relationship that exists between temporary employment agencies and third party employers. This gap in the literature seems surprising, as the interactions between these two organisations are undoubtedly influential in the agency employment industry. The responsibilities demanded in the agency's role could be considered a 'balancing act' between fulfilling the needs of the client company and the individual agency worker, and addressing this gap in the literature seems a logical objective made possible by the multiple-perspectives approach of the current thesis.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of research into the implications of agency working has focussed upon the experiences of the individual agency worker, and these studies will be examined in greater detail in chapters five and six. Adopting this focus prevents consideration of the permanent worker influence, and several studies have adapted their research designs to include the perceptions of these employees as a result. The significant findings present in research focussing upon the organisational commitment of permanent staff indicates that the utilisation of agency workers is perceived as an action of the employer, and that reaction may be targeted towards the organisation as a result. Research has indicated that a company's decision to utilise agency staff may meet with varying reactions from its permanent workforce, although increased analysis suggests that these reactions often depend upon the motives that permanent workers believe underlie their employer's decision. Positive reaction may stem from the perceived protection from external factors (e.g. Bishop et al, 2001; Parker et al, 2002), whilst negative reactions may result from any perceived threats that permanent workers adjudge agency workers to represent (e.g. Pearce, 1993; Rogers, 2000). The lack of any actual threat posed by agency staff may prove irrelevant, as agency workers will often bear the brunt of these negative perceptions through no fault of their own. The current thesis will consider

how permanent worker perceptions may formulate, and explore ways of preventing them in the future. Research that has accounted for perspectives other than the individual agency worker has forwarded some interesting findings, and the current thesis will incorporate various viewpoints to provide a stronger overview of the agency employment industry.

A key question posed by the thesis relates to the extent to which agency working can benefit individuals, and the chapter identified several areas where this aid may occur. One example results from the current global recession, and suggests that temporary employment agencies may be ideally placed to provide a way in to the UK workforce for potentially vulnerable individuals. A second benefit that agency work may have upon an individual's future employment is its potential ability to facilitate transitions into permanent roles. By introducing an individual into a client company on a temporary basis, the agency provides them with an opportunity to impress a potential employer that may have proved inaccessible under more traditional circumstances. Whilst this form of staffing may also save the company many of the financial burdens of running their own recruitment operation, several studies have cast doubt upon the likelihood of individuals securing permanent working opportunities in this manner (e.g. Amuedo-Dorantes, 2000; Rogers, 2000).

The chapter continued by referring to training, which becomes a problematic topic when discussed in relation to agency workers. As stated in the previous chapter, companies needing to increase the skill set of their workforce could be faced with a 'make or buy' decision (Von Hippel, Mangum, Greenberger, Heneman, & Skoglund, 1997), in which 'to make' would involve training pre-existing permanent employees, and 'to buy' would lead to hiring temporary staff in possession of the required skills. The third option of training pre-existing agency workers has limited appeal for employers, and research above has unsurprisingly argued that agency workers were more likely to miss out upon training opportunities open to permanent employees as a result. Even though excluding agency workers from training may be financially justifiable for the organisation, the relationship between the worker and the company may ultimately suffer as a result, as exclusion may negatively impact upon an agency worker's personal development and level of commitment towards the organisation and the relationships that may otherwise have been forged with managers and co-workers. Assessing the influence that agency employment may have upon an individual's future employment prospects represents an important avenue of investigation for the current thesis to pursue.

As the current chapter has demonstrated, agency work is a multi-billion pound business in the UK, and even conservative estimates place the number of individuals employed within agency work in the hundreds of thousands. One of the key strengths that agency workers can offer individuals and organisations is flexibility, and this will be explored in detail in the following chapter. The chapter will also explore what stands to be the most influential piece of legislation agreed upon in the EU, the Agency Workers Directive.

4. The Flexible Workforce and its Future

4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, the analysis of UK workforce surveys and financial statistics of the industry indicated the popularity possessed by temporary employment agencies, whose turnover in the UK totalled over £19.7 billion for the 2009/10 financial year (REC, 2011). The flexible working opportunities that agency working provides at an individual and organisational level are central to this popularity, making it a significant focus of the current thesis. The current chapter will explore this theme by considering the incentives that temporary employment agencies forward to companies and the employment opportunities offered to individual agency workers.

At an organisational level, the increased importance placed upon flexible forms of working can be broadly attributed to the underlying economic concept of 'supply and demand'. Harvey's (1990) model of flexible accumulation outlined a shift towards this form of working in the latter half of the twentieth century, and the current chapter will begin by considering this model in the context of agency working. The chapter continues by evaluating the term as it exists in the present day market, as well as some of the issues and concerns commentators have voiced in reaction to this form of employee utilisation. It is no coincidence that the growth in various temporary working arrangements has coincided with a shift in the approach of companies to labour utilisation, and the chapter considers how the agency employment industry has influenced this shift in its role as a representative of a temporary worker category.

After exploring the impact of the flexible workforce from an organisational perspective, the chapter shifts to an individual perspective, specifically that of agency workers. The provision of flexible working opportunities to individuals is benefit of agency working that is frequently cited by the websites of temporary employment agencies, and is central to the proposed assistance these organisations can supply individuals. However, researchers have questioned industry claims regarding the true level of flexibility that agency working can offer its workers, and these conflicting accounts will be outlined and evaluated in order to compare them to the organisational benefits specified in the early stages of this chapter.

The chapter concludes by investigating what many consider to be the biggest 'shake-up' of European agency employment and its role in meeting the demands of organisations striving to be flexible, the Agency Workers Directive. The incentive of flexibility is prominent in the discourse of the agency employment industry, and could even be considered central to its very survival. Legislative change has unsurprisingly met with a mixed response, as critics have argued that the Directive will reduce the capacity temporary employment agencies possess in providing flexibility to their clients. Despite these concerns, recent legislative change has been agreed, and will be introduced into UK employment law on the 1st of October 2011 (BIS, 2010). The outline of the Directive will be discussed, key voices in the recent debate will be highlighted, and the predicted implications that the Directive may lead to will be explored in detail using the thesis's multiple perspectives approach.

4.2. Flexibility and the Flexible Workforce

4.2.1. Origins of the Flexible Workforce

In his book 'The Condition of Postmodernity', Harvey (1990) traced the development of flexibility, or rather the drive for flexibility, and described its escalation as key contributor to the failure of the large scale, slow moving production process in the early twentieth century characterised by 'Fordism'. Harvey (1990) regarded the symbolic initiation date of Fordism to be that of 1914, when Henry Ford introduced his five-dollar, eight-hour day as recompense for workers manning the automated assembly line he had established the year before at Dearborn, Michigan. In the latter stages of the twentieth century, confrontation of the rigidities of Fordism led to the rise of what Harvey (1990, p. 147) 'tentatively' referred to as 'flexible accumulation'. The approach relies on flexibility as a key component to labour processes, labour markets, and production, and has entailed rapid shifts in the pattern of uneven development. As a result of flexible accumulation, the labour market has undergone a radical restructuring in an effect to counteract strong market volatility, heightened competition, and narrowing profit margins. This has led employers to take advantage of weakened union power and pools of surplus labourers by pushing through work regimes and labour contracts that incorporate increased levels of flexibility (Harvey, 1990). By reorganising their corporate workforce into core and peripheral workers, companies are hoping to meet demands for labour whilst decreasing their labour costs (Henson, 1996).

Temporary employment agencies represent potential facilitators to the division of a workforce outlined by Harvey (1990). By engaging their services, companies are

able to rapidly increase the size of their periphery workforce. The lack of obligation in the agency worker contract allows this process to be reversed almost instantly, allowing them to shed employees without threatening their core of permanent staff. This practice has adopted increased significance with the onset of recession, making it a key concern for the thesis to address.

4.2.2. Flexibility in the Present-Day Workforce

The issue of flexibility can be widened to a context far beyond that of agency working, and the implications of flexible working arrangements have led to discussions on topics including stress, motivation, insecurity, the individual and the collective dimension at work, the employer/employee relationship, and corporate culture (Reilly, 1998b). The term flexibility can be broadly divided into macro-level, which is typically viewed at a national level and relates to how the labour market can adjust to different economic circumstances, and micro-level, which concerns organisational aspects that Reilly (1998a) further distinguished as numerical, functional, temporal, locational, and financial. The utilisation of agency staff will typically come under the term 'numerical flexibility', as an organisation can react to market demand relatively quickly by using agency workers to bolster the size of its workforce.

Although employment flexibility takes many forms, Guest (2004) cited contract flexibility as the form that holds particular attraction for organisations, and the reduced obligations inherent in agency worker contracts of employment makes them arguably the most flexible worker group in the UK labour market. Temporary employment agencies provide third party employers with the benefits of workforce flexibility whilst minimising their responsibilities in aspects relating to hiring, firing, and contract management, which permanent employment may demand.

4.2.3. Reactions to the Flexible Workforce

In order to assess the practice of flexible working amongst European organisations, Tregaskis, Brewster, Mayne, and Hegewisch (1998) drew upon quantitative statistics from over six-thousand medium to large employers across Europe, and qualitative data from a study of flexibility in organisations from Sweden, Italy, and the UK. Findings indicated a substantial amount of flexible working throughout Europe that has continued to increase, and this has attracted some strong debate. The development of the flexible workforce is viewed by some as a long overdue move away from an insistence on standard forms of employment towards forms that

can be more responsive, or 'family friendly', to the needs of employees. Others see the development of flexibility as a means of making the labour market more responsive to economic requirements by delivering a cheaper workforce that is also more productive, efficient, and competitive (Tregaskis et al, 1998).

Conversely, the development has been seen by some as having taken back our societies towards the early years of the industrial revolution, with the creation of a significant underclass of underprivileged and vulnerable workers. Critics see the move as evidence of an uncaring and irresponsible approach to employees and employers, which has sometimes been associated with a desire to 'de-unionise' the workforce (Tregaskis et al, 1998). This conclusion was supported by Golden and Appelbaum (1992), who argued that minimising costs by reducing the size of the core workforce whilst expanding flexible staffing arrangements conflicted with the union objective of increasing the number of core jobs. Research by Reilly (1998a) also highlighted doubt over flexible working arrangements, stating that others, especially trade union leaders, reject the benefits claimed for flexibility, seeing it as a means to cut wage costs and increase employment insecurity.

Other research has also suggested a link between the number of temporary contracts and the level of job insecurity. After analysing labour force survey statistics between the years 1992 and 1997, Green (2008) argued that the rise in temporary contracts (from 5.5 percent in 1992 to 7.5 percent in 1997) coincided with an increase in job insecurity, and that subsequent decline in temporary labour between 1997 and 2005 (to 5.5 percent) paralleled a fall in perceptions of job insecurity (although agency worker usage witnessed a slight rise over this time).

Maintaining levels of flexibility within a workforce can be an important objective for organisations, as it is often seen as a necessary response to potentially volatile business conditions (Reilly, 1998a). Agency working has come to symbolise many of the arguments put forward with regard to the large-scale shift in labour usage that took place in the latter half of the twentieth century. Critics point to issues of vulnerability, insecurity, and irresponsible employers, but supporters regard the flexible opportunities that agency employment is meant to provide as an evolution in working arrangements that are adapting to the changing needs of the modern-day workforce. Therefore, understanding the implications of agency working can provide insight into an employment shift in a far wider context.

4.3. Flexibility and the Agency Employment Industry

At an organisational level, the ability to adapt to fluctuations in demand can be critical if organisations are to be successful, and it could be argued that non-permanent employment is used as a response to hard economic conditions that require leaner and more flexible workforces (Tregaskis, 1997). It is therefore unsurprising that organisations frequently employ agency workers, as employing staff on a temporary basis can provide companies with rapidly increasing levels of flexibility by boosting workforce size, or by introducing specialists into the company. Druker and Stanworth (2001) described one such example in which demand for temporary workers with IT skills was particularly high due to the widespread concern over the protection of information systems in the run up to the millennium.

Research by Rogers (2000, p. 25) made similar claims, stating that agency worker utilisation can: "... be seen as a means for bringing in low-priced workers to do low-priced work. The permanent core is where high-skilled, high-priced work is done.". Matusik and Hill (1998) offered another example from the computer software industry where a temporary increase in workforce size would be required. Customer service enquiries would typically reach the greatest volume in the month immediately following the release of a new software programme, before diminishing significantly thereafter. It is therefore efficient to use non-permanent workers for predicted periods of high demand, and to only use permanent workers to cover periods of low demand (Matusik & Hill, 1998).

The need for flexibility has exerted pressure at an organisational level (David, 2005; Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993; Forde & Slater, 2005; Kraimer, Wayne, Liden & Sparrowe, 2005; McClurg, 1999; Nienhüser & Matiaske, 2006), and as a category of temporary employees, agency workers have represented a valuable option for companies trying to meet these demands. Conversely, the desire for flexible employment is not solely that of the organisation, but can also be a major factor in an individual's decision to enter into a temporary agency worker employment arrangement (Allan & Sienko, 1997; Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Ellingson, Gruys, & Sackett, 1998). A report by CIETT (2000) also highlighted the increased need and desire for flexibility in employment relations, citing the importance of considering the basic human need for continuity and certainty in an individual's employment. Work such as this suggests that the desire for flexibility is not solely that of organisations competing in the workplace, but also that of individuals seeking employment to suit their current situations.

Agency workers can provide flexibility to an organisation in a variety of ways. Engaging the services of the temporary employment agency can provide a speedy response to staff absence ranging from maternity leave to potentially unpredictable or long-term illness. The agency may also facilitate a relatively drastic increase in the size of a workforce, or the specialist skills contained within it, enabling companies to deal with sudden increases in demand that may not be assured in the future. Storrie (2002) highlighted the benefit of numerical flexibility, describing how the third party employer could engage significant quantity of workers from the temporary employment agency. When examining the key motivators of undertaking agency work at an individual level, a perceived sense of flexibility is often cited by researchers as one of the main benefits to the approach of work (e.g. Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Feldman et al, 1994; Morris & Vekker, 2001). Ellingson et al (1998) reported this factor, along with the freedom and variation in employment that temporary work offers, as a major incentive for individuals looking to become agency workers. Assessing whether these benefits are experienced by agency workers has been the focus of several researchers, whilst others have focussed on whether these perceived benefits are offset fairly by some of the negative aspects that have been associated with agency work from an individual perspective. In order to assess the perceptions individuals hold regarding the positive and negative characteristics associated with agency employment, some of the motives that lead individuals into this form of employment will be outlined.

4.3.1. The Individual Motives of Agency Workers

Research into the motives possessed by individuals employed as agency workers has cited the desire for flexible working arrangements as a strong attraction. Druker and Stanworth's (2004) sample of forty-two agency workers presented a variety of different reasons for engaging the services of a temporary employment agency. Among the sample were first-time jobbers who enjoyed the flexibility, people who were planning, engaged in, or who had recently returned from long-haul travel, and people who were seeking, or had just been offered, permanent employment. The sample also contained participants who had changed their employment situation due to impending marriage, citing a desire for the extra security that an extra source of income would provide. Several other individuals were experiencing career transitions, and viewed 'temping' as a method of repositioning themselves in the labour market, whilst others had been made redundant or had taken early retirement. Despite voicing a preference for permanent employment, the redundancy sufferers in the sample also spoke well of the opportunities offered by

agency work. Several other participants, including students and recent graduates waiting to see what the market has to offer, voluntarily rejected the pursuit of permanent employment, instead voicing a preference for the opportunity agency employment provided. Feldman et al (1994) unearthed similar findings in the US, reporting a range of individuals that may benefit from a temporary contract of employment, including working mothers, college students, workers who have taken early retirement, and individuals who have recently relocated geographically. These findings appear to support industry claims that agency working can provide employment opportunities for individuals in a wide range of situation. The extent of these benefits will be considered in greater detail when analysing the thesis's findings.

4.3.2. The Individual Benefits for Agency Workers

The internet represents a resource where companies can forward the benefits of their services, and this is no different for temporary employment agencies. Even a quick review of company websites highlighted several positives to agency working, ranging from flexible working practices, development of skills and training, opportunities to learn about companies and secure permanent positions, and experiences that may prove useful to C.V construction. Reed's website described several such examples, stating that 'temping' can give you greater control over your working life and allow you to develop new skills that enhance your C.V, as well as providing an "ideal way to get your foot in the door of a company for whom you would like to work", or allowing employers a chance to assess your suitability for a permanent position with them (Reed website, 2009). Hays made similar claims on their website, stating that agency working can provide flexibility, choice, and variety of experience, as well as a chance to broaden individuals' skills bases, enhance C.V's, and sharpen skills in a way that will make individuals more attractive to prospective employers (Hays website, 2009). Other big names in the industry also cited the benefits of flexibility. On their website, Manpower (website, 2009) asked "are you at a point in your life where you need greater flexibility?", and on their website, Brookstreet (website, 2009) described a desire for freedom over school holidays or an antipathy for working in the same place for too long as potential precursors to agency employment. Each of these companies are large-scale chains of temporary employment agencies, and represent a significant portion of the agency workers in the UK.

Another technique agencies employ is the inclusion of 'success stories' (Henson, 1996; Rogers, 2000). Blue Arrow (website, 2009) listed several on their website, and abstracts included: "Having just celebrated my anniversary, having been placed permanently by yourself a year ago, I thought I'd let you know that I still remember and am still grateful for your professionalism, approachability and interest in the way you dealt with the annoying details of my search for new employment opportunities.", "I just wanted to email to say thank-you very much for sorting [friend's name] and I out with a day's work so quickly...", "I would like to say how professional and friendly I found Blue Arrow. I'm not just saying this because I have a lovely new job to go to its just that I have been disappointed with agencies in the past and never had such great treatment before.". Abstracts from Concept Staffing's website also suggested some positive outcomes: "You found me a position at [name of company] that turned into a permanent job. When I first moved to Wiltshire, Concept Staffing found me a job when all the other agencies failed to show any real interest in finding me a job.", "Within a week I was placed into a role and this has since become permanent.", "It was good to deal with a consultant that had mine as well as business interests at heart, a thing that does not usually happen in your industry.". It is unsurprising that claims like these are presented on the websites of temporary employment agencies, although their claims have also been supported by independent researchers. Storrie (2002) is one such example, citing the potential for an obligation-free exchange of information between the individual and the organisation. By exposing more workers to more firms, the agency employment industry may be capable of achieving more and better job matches (Storrie, 2002).

In research by Golden and Appelbaum (1992), statistical analysis indicated that despite only representing a small minority of the workforce, the average monthly change in general temporary employment represented 37 percent of the US workforce's entire changes between the years 1982-88, indicating that agency workers were frequently entering and leaving employment. A degree of freedom for agency workers also exists in the UK, as an individual under a contract of service cannot be penalised for ending an assignment (BERR, 2009b). A desire for contractual freedom was indicated as a strong benefit by US contingent workers in Allan and Sienko's (1997) sample, and comparisons drawn between permanent and general temporary worker groups in research by De Cuyper, De Jong, De Witte, Isaksson, Rigotti and Schalk (2008) claim that permanent workers may feel locked into their jobs more than temporary workers do, as they may fear the costs associated with leaving. These findings indicate that temporary employment

agencies can offer a high number of working opportunities that demand little contractual obligation from the individual, but what is less clear is whether the potential freedom and control that this form of employment offers is of greater benefit for the individual or for the employer. The flexible working opportunities that agency working can provide individuals have been highlighted by employment agency advertisements and several studies, yet a significant quantity of academic research has cast doubt upon these claims.

4.3.3. The Problems for Agency Workers

The apparent lack of contractual obligation outlined in the research above indicates that the agency employment industry provides flexible working opportunities for its agency staff, although the high turnover rates highlighted in Golden and Appelbaum's (1992) research may also have negative repercussions for these workers. Participants interviewed as part of Druker and Stanworth's (2004) research claimed that, although there appeared to be a freedom to leave, doing so was likely to affect the agency's perception of that employee, and therefore the agency may be reluctant to place that worker into another organisation for fear they might repeat their previous behaviour. In their conclusion, Druker and Stanworth (2004, p. 72) go so far as to say: "...some of the freedom of agency working may in fact be illusory.". Possessing the freedom to leave assignments and pursue other options without experiencing any negative consequences associated with a breach of contract is one of the clearest indications of a flexible working arrangement for individual workers. This freedom is questioned by research indicating that negative consequences can result; they are just harder to define, substantiate, and measure.

Research by Henson has also cast serious doubt on the true extent of flexibility that individual agency workers enjoy in comparison to the other parties involved in the triangular employment relationship, and has even gone as far as to label it a myth. In his research on the individual experiences of agency worker flexibility, Henson (1996, p. 48) argued that: "This myth of temporaries' scheduling flexibility masks the often deficient or sporadic supply of temporary work." citing that incidents of flexibility scheduling were few and far between. Henson (1996) also found that individuals attempted to curry favour with their agencies by sacrificing whatever flexibility they had in the hope of being offered regular assignments, and although client companies enjoyed staffing flexibility through 'hassle-free' contract termination and easy access to pools of agency staff, individuals were often at the mercy of agencies and assignment supervisors.

Rogers (2000) forwarded some similar statements reflecting upon the imbalance of flexibility between individual agency workers and their agencies and assignments. Rogers (2000) argued that it was the agency workers themselves who needed to be flexible in order to meet the inflexible demands of the jobs, agencies, and clients. In Henson's (1996) sample, the same people who cited flexibility as a motivating factor complained about the unpredictable supply of work, and never refused a proffered assignment or quit a particularly unpleasant one. After interviewing a series of temporary staff working for the local council, Conley (2002) found that individuals with families in the sample reported feeling unable to plan long-term with regard to holidays, as future employment was never assured. When industry declarations over levels of individual flexibility are scrutinised in light of this growing list of findings, the disparity between these claims and the reported experiences of agency workers becomes hard to ignore.

Agency employment industry advocates list the ways individuals can take advantage of flexible working arrangements, be it the ability to book last minute holidays, take of time off to fulfil personal engagements, fulfil child care duties, attend interviews for alternative employment, or smooth transitions from assignment to assignment. However, agency workers may regard their apparent capacity to exercise these benefits with suspicion and anxiety, and decide against taking these opportunities for fear of incurring some kind of immediate, or long-term, penalty from the agency. Unsurprisingly, Henson (1996, p. 55) stated that the agency workers interviewed reported: "...that they rarely turned down, quit, or interrupted an assignment for fear of retribution from their agency counsellors.". The resulting increase in anxiety could be moderated by how important the employment arrangement was to the individual, with the more reliant staff ultimately experiencing all the negative implications of agency working in relation to reduced pay and job security among others, yet none of the benefits of flexibility publicised by the industry. The extent of these benefits is cast further into doubt by Forde and Slater's (2005) research into British agency workers, as only a minority of the study's participants reported a preference for this form of employment. After analysing evidence gathered in fifteen national reports commissioned by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Storrie (2002) reached a similar conclusion, suggesting that the participant perceptions of benefits did not match those of the temporary employment agencies.

Advocates of agency working have also argued that greater levels of flexibility also exist in the form of an increased utilisation of the skills that individual agency

workers possess. However, in Hall's (2006) research, there is little evidence that temporary work agencies succeeded more efficiently in matching skills to clients; in fact, agency workers were actually less likely than direct employees to report good utilisation of their skills. Hall (2006) deduced that the flexibility of agency working was more beneficial for the employer than the individual agency worker, the diversity of work was reflected more in the short-term nature of the engagements than in the inherent quality of the work, and that the chance of permanent conversion was open to the few rather than the many. Although two-thirds of Hall's (2006) sample reported that they 'chose' agency work, Hall (2006) called into question the conditions that led to this decision, concluding that evidence suggested that two-thirds of the sample would have preferred direct employment. The validity of assessing whether an individual is in a temporary role voluntarily has been called into question by Ellingson, Gruys, and Sackett (1998), who highlighted the need for measures of increasing complexity in place of single dichotomous scales. Another factor affecting individual experiences of flexibility is the level of skill. The majority of Roger's (2000) sample were relatively low skilled clerical workers, but 'temporary professionals', who in this case predominantly comprised of case lawyers, were also analysed. Rogers (2000) found that the higher-skilled workers in her sample benefitted from a greater degree of flexibility compared with the lower-skilled temporary clerical workers, as they were paid more, and could therefore choose to work fewer assignments. Rogers (2000) concluded that the flexibility professionals often experienced could therefore be misattributed to the agency workers as a whole.

For some individuals, the issue of flexibility may often become irrelevant, as agency workers may form a positive working relationship with the third party employer and, as a result, do not want to leave the organisation that they have been paired with. If this situation occurs, the concept of flexibility may prove inconsequential for the individual, as they may want to enjoy an ongoing relationship of employment with the company. Nevertheless, agency workers who were interviewed by Druker and Stanworth (2004) stated that, although they may have felt secure in an organisation, their contract continuation typically relied upon weekly renewal, and several had experienced being brutally axed by the third party employer. Experiences like these suggest a precarious working relationship endured by agency workers who may never experience the levels of job security that many permanent workers take for granted. These concerns could be exacerbated by the fact that the drive towards flexibility has occurred at the same time as a weakening of trade union power

(Reilly, 1998a). As a result, some of the protection that would have been afforded individual workers may have been at least partially exchanged for the organisational desire to increase levels of flexibility in order to meet the demands of the global market. The precariousness of agency working indicated by research has been one of the subjects of discussion which have resulted in legislative change in the form of the Agency Workers Directive, and this will now be explored further.

4.4. The Agency Workers Directive

Recent years have witnessed intense debate surrounding the laws governing agency worker usage in the UK and throughout Europe. Attempts have been made by various EU presidencies to find a solution that would increase the rights of the estimated eight million 'temps' across Europe since the first proposals by the European Commission in 2002 (Contractor Calculator, 2008). Advocates of new legislation have typically argued that agency workers experience unfair treatment in aspects relating to pay, training, and access to company facilities. Opposition to the legislation have argued that the economy would suffer if severe restrictions were enforced, as business would suffer from a reduction in flexible working opportunities. The UK's adoption of the Fixed-term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations in 2002 took steps to improve the rights of fixed-term contractors, but ensured that temporary agency workers were excluded from any changes. In the UK, the conflicting points of view surrounding the adoption of the Agency Workers Directive are symbolised by two of the strongest voices outside of the government; the Trade Union Congress (TUC), which has traditionally been in favour of legislative change that would aid agency workers, and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), who have frequently opposed legislative change associated with agency worker usage. The influence these organisations have had upon the adoption of the Directive will now be considered.

4.4.1. Trade Union Influence on the Agency Workers Directive

Trade unions have often had conflicting aims and opinions about the agency employment industry, and these often depend upon the allegiances held by the specific Union. The debates prior to, and during, the discussions held regarding the proposed Agency Workers Directive offered an excellent example of conflicting points of view regarding the use of temporary agency workers in the UK. Two widely opposing reactions over legislative change are held by the TUC and CBI, and these organisations have represented two of the most influential voices involved in discussions outside of the UK and EU parliaments. The TUC describe themselves

as the 'voice of Britain at work', with 58 affiliated unions representing nearly seven million working people. The organisation seeks to build links with political parties, business, local communities and wider society (TUC Website, 2009). The CBI is the UK's leading business organisation, speaking for some 240,000 businesses that together employ around a third of the private sector workforce. Member companies, which decide all policy positions, include: 80 of the FTSE 100, some 200,000 small and medium-size firms, more than 20,000 manufacturers, and over 150 sectoral associations (CBI, 2008d). Between them, the TUC and CBI possess massive influence, and this influence has been witnessed in the debate surrounding the rights of agency workers.

In recent years, the TUC has called upon the UK government to do all it could to encourage the EU to sign up to an agreement that would give equal treatment rights from the first day of an agency worker's assignment (TUC, 2007a). In contrast, the CBI called for a qualifying period of 12 months, stating that this was in line with other time-limited employment rights, and that a shorter time period may fail to take into account any differences in regards to gaps in skill and experience (CBI, 2008d). John Cridland, CBI Deputy Director-General, added that:

"Very few temporary workers qualify as vulnerable and even fewer are exploited. Around half choose temporary work over a permanent job, and many are well paid. All are protected by rights covering working time, paid holiday, minimum wage, discrimination and health and safety." (CBI, 2008d).

The CBI has also criticised some of the arguments forwarded by unions, stating that: "Union attempts to lump all temporary workers under the category of 'vulnerable' simply do not wash." (CBI, 2008e).

Previous incarnations of legislative change have been blocked, and the CBI has considered this a cause for celebration, having previously warned that vulnerable workers would not benefit from proposed increases in protection, that 250,000 jobs would be put at risk, and that the UK would lose a vital competitive edge (CBI, 2008d). The CBI has also commented further on previous obstructions of the Directive, arguing that hundreds of thousands of people in the UK prefer to work on a project-by-project basis, and employers depend on access to this pool of flexible labour so they can respond to the ebbs and flows of the economy (CBI, 2007a). Despite claims of agency worker vulnerability, such as those made by the Commission on Vulnerable Employment report (CoVE, 2008) discussed in the previous chapter, organisations including the CBI dispute the impression that all

agency workers can be classed as 'vulnerable' (CBI, 2008a). The CBI opposed legislative change in the debates leading up to the agreement to adopt the Agency Workers Directive, labelling it a 'costly new equal treatment regime' that would undermine job prospects for agency temps and those seeking to return to the labour market, and instead called for improved enforcement of the protection that agency workers were provided in discrimination law prior to the recent proposed legislative changes (CBI, 2008c). Whilst the CBI's allegiance to British businesses must be considered as a context for such comments, their claim that the Agency Workers Directive would lead to reduced individual employment opportunities is undoubtedly a valid concern. These doubts are exacerbated by the current financial climate, and will be a major factor in the thesis's investigation.

In February 2008, the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced support for a new 'Temporary Agency Workers' Commission', chaired by Sir George Bain, which would seek to bring together the TUC and CBI with regard to the Temporary and Agency Workers (Equal Treatment) Bill that was due to have its second reading in parliament later that month (Blacklock, 2008). Amongst the agreements made at the commission was the entitlement of equal treatment for agency workers after 12 weeks in a given job, and that occupational social security schemes would fall outside the equal treatment provisions. The agreement between the TUC and CBI helped break the deadlock on discussions in the EU by providing a basis on which the UK and other Member States could agree the Agency Workers Directive (BERR, 2008b). Trade unions have claimed a great deal of responsibility for the passing of the Directive, with the TUC Regional Secretary Roger McKenzie commenting on the breakthrough joint agreement with the CBI as: "... a victory for union campaigning." (TUC, 2008). In hindsight, a report from the department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (which has since changed to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills) a year later described the significance of the arrangement, stating that the UK government always supported the Directive, and the breakthrough agreement between the CBI and TUC led to the legislation's proposed implementation in the UK (BERR, 2009a).

A report by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS, 2010) further dissected the rather broad statement of 'equal treatment' by outlining the most influential changes demanded by the legislation. Areas affected from day one of an assignment include access to amenities, 'temp-to-perm' fees, improved access to training, and a requirement to inform agency workers about permanent vacancies. Several other areas are subject to potential change after a twelve week qualifying

period, many of which relate to pay. Equal treatment not only concerns basic hourly rate, but also payment for overtime, shift allowances, holiday pay, and bonus entitlements related to the performance of the individual. Further topics also include holiday allowance, working time, overtime, breaks, rest periods, and night work (BIS, 2010).

4.4.2. Reaction to the Agency Workers Directive

After agreement over legislative change was reached in December 2008, the implementation date of the Agency Workers Directive in the UK has been set for the 1st of October, 2011 (BIS, 2010). Commentators have argued that as a result of the twelve-week adoption period that is currently outlined in the Directive, around half of agency assignments will remain unaffected, leading the CBI to argue that the latest proposal to be accepted represented the “least worst outcome available for British business” (CBI, 2008f). After comparing findings from previous CBI and SORA surveys, research by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills supported these claims by reporting that over half of current agency working assignments would not qualify for the changes outlined in the Directive (BIS, 2010). Commenting on the backing by the European Parliament of a new Directive for agency workers, Katja Hall, the CBI’s Director of Employment Policy stated that: “This Directive will not be welcomed by employers, but it is less damaging than previous proposals as key flexibilities that underpin UK competitiveness have been protected” (CBI, 2008b). The agreed implementation of the Directive has led some to question its ability to provide welcome relief for agency workers trapped in insecure working arrangements, and whether it will cut back further on the opportunities of employment that are already hard to come by in a difficult economic climate. Unsurprisingly, debate has been ongoing with regard to the implications that adopting the Agency Workers Directive will have upon the UK workforce, and these arguments will now be explored.

4.4.3. The Effects of the Agency Workers Directive

As already mentioned, many studies have stated that agency workers are regarded as under-protected in several ways. The events introduced in chapter one highlighted how this lack of protection can manifest itself, as well as the effect that the adoption of the Agency Workers Directive could have upon UK employment practices. In February 2009, news broke that staff in BMW’s Mini Cowley plant in Oxford had reacted angrily when told that eight hundred and fifty agency workers were being laid off with immediate effect. Staff were reported to have thrown fruit at

the leaders of the Unite union, claiming that they felt betrayed (BBC, 2009a). As a representative of the Unite union, Bernard Moss described the biggest issue as being that workers were told one hour from the end of the shift that they had not got a job (BBC, 2009a). An agency worker from the staff claimed that he felt like a 'second class' employee in comparison to permanent staff, as he had worked at the plant for three and a half years and been sacked for no reason (BBC, 2009a).

Whilst agency workers may work continuously with their third party employers over several years, it would be highly unlikely for a tribunal to agree that these workers possessed a contract of employment with the client company, which would in turn prevent them from pursuing any claims for unfair dismissal or redundancy payment available to permanent staff (BBC, 2009b). Job losses amongst agency staff in the UK resulting from the economic difficulties have not been isolated, as many of the 15,000 layoffs in 2009 by BT included third party employees i.e. contractors and agency staff (Metro, 2009). The UK government's severe underestimation over the influx of migrant workers in recent years has also increased calls for tighter regulation. Latest estimates suggest that 427,000 workers registered for work in the first two years after accession, dwarfing government predictions of 15,000 per annum, and as many of these migrants use agencies to find them work, the need for increased oversight and control of the industry is amplified (Green, 2008). These reports describe the results which stem from the reduced protection and fewer employment rights inherent in agency working, and a key aim of the Agency Workers Directive would be to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

A great deal of the anxiety and criticism resulting from the decision to implement the Agency Workers Directive has related to the greater costs that are undoubtedly going to result. The largest contributor to this financial impact has been identified as the equalisation of wages that agency workers will receive twelve weeks into their assignment, and several varying estimations of cost have been forwarded. Perhaps the most comprehensive estimate was recently outlined in a report by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which estimated the overall gross wage benefit for agency workers to be between £1,196 and £1,327 million a year, which translates as a net benefit of between £897 and 995 million per year increase after tax (BIS, 2010). The report concluded that between 85-100 percent of the increased wages demanded from agency worker utilisation would be passed on to the third party employer by the temporary employment agency (BIS, 2010), and this has been a cause of alarm for UK businesses.

A survey into company reaction to the proposed Agency Workers Directive by 'Eversheds' found the key concern at company level related to the perceived increase in costs expected to accompany the Directive, with just over 80 percent of the survey population believing that employment costs in the UK will increase, and the majority of these respondents believing the costs will increase by up to one quarter (Eversheds, 2008). Wage increases represent the largest contributor, but the survey went on to outline further perceived antecedents to increased costs, which included: a greater amount of paperwork and administration resulting from increased monitoring and likely quicker turnover of agency staff, additional training due to an amplified turnover of agency staff, reduced flexibility (as it is likely that fewer agency staff will be engaged), and more regular outsourcing of work as an alternative to agency workers, as well as greater use of permanent staff to cover workload. Other concerns outlined by the survey included: a rise in training needs, a lack of flexibility, more tribunal claims, increased workloads or pressure for existing employees, service delivery problems, and more 'red tape', leading to defensive book-keeping (Eversheds, 2008).

Financial implications have received a great deal of attention since plans to implement the Agency Workers Directive were announced, but other repercussions have also been highlighted. Unsurprisingly, many have argued that the incentive for employing agency workers would fall (Lavin, 2005), which in turn limits the flexibility of the UK workforce (Black, 2006). After arguing that automatically treating all agency employees as vulnerable was simply "crass", one experienced individual in the recruitment industry concluded by labelling the Agency Workers Directive a "nasty piece of legislation" (Palfery-Smith, 2009). Other critics have suggested that negative consequences for permanent workers will also result, as organisations that would have hired agency workers to cover peaks in demand will resort to asking their permanent employees to work longer hours instead (McNeill, 2008). A similar conclusion was reached by the CBI, who argued that some the changes demanded by the Directive would become an administrative nightmare that may confuse 'temps' and deter businesses from using agency workers, and that several smaller firms had reported that they would look to their existing staff for overtime (CBI, 2008g).

The timing of the Agency Workers Directive's implementation has also received criticism. Agency working is considered mutually beneficial for employers unwilling to take on permanent staff and individual job seekers looking for employment opportunities, yet opponents to the Directive claim that creating unnecessary

bureaucracy and increasing costs may hinder the vital role that agency workers are likely to play in the economic recovery, resulting in reduced demand for agency staff (CBI, 2008d). Research has also suggested that a large number of agency worker jobs will be lost. In the 2007 CBI/Per Temps annual employment trends survey of over five-hundred firms, which between them employ some 1.1 million staff, reported that fifty-eight per cent of employers indicated such a law would lead to a 'significant' cut in the use of temporary workers, suggesting that 250,000 placements could be lost across the whole labour market (CBI, 2008d). When researching the implications of the Agency Workers Directive, Forde and Slater (2005) argued that the debate has occurred in the absence of sound empirical evidence, and with potential implications on the horizon, further research into how current or future litigation and law change Directives may affect temporary agency workers would be timely and valuable. By incorporating several perspectives into the research design, the thesis will gauge reaction to the Agency Workers Directive from various parties involved in the employment of agency workers.

4.5. Summary and Conclusions

As an incentive for individuals and organisations, flexibility is undoubtedly one of the key factors in the success of agency employment, yet the question remains: what is the true cost of this flexibility, and are these costs equally spread between the individual and the organisation? In the current global marketplace, organisational flexibility is essential for survival, and as a result of recent economic difficulties, sheer survival has become the main priority for countless companies around the world. As a result, it is highly likely that future growth will at least partially rely upon agency workers who can be employed and released depending upon demand, which may remain unpredictable for years to come. The current chapter highlighted several studies that have identified the value that agency working can represent for companies keen to avoid the commitments embedded in more traditional permanent contracts of employment. Agency workers can allow companies to plug unexpected gaps in their workforce caused by illness, resignation, or maternity leave. The fast access to staff facilitated by temporary employment agencies can also represent sharp increases in workforce size, allowing companies to meet demands with greater ease. The organisational benefits that the agency employment industry can offer clients ensure that companies experiencing a variety of needs can benefit in the short term and the long term. Understanding the impact that meeting these needs can have upon the individual agency worker represents another objective of the current thesis.

Whilst organisations have undoubtedly benefited from the flexible staffing arrangements agency workers have facilitated over many years, the chapter has demonstrated that the individual benefits have been less clear. Whilst findings above suggest that a proportion of employees have received benefits that are often restricted to permanent workers (e.g. Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Feldman et al, 1994; Krausz, Brandwein & Fox, 1995) other researchers have argued that such benefits are negligible, or even non-existent (e.g. Hall, 2006; Henson, 1996; Rogers, 2000). One of the key difficulties in gauging the degree of flexibility experienced by individuals is the absence of any valid and effective large-scale methods of assessment, making claims difficult to isolate, evaluate, and substantiate. The advertisements of temporary employment agencies have typically focussed upon real-life 'stories' of how the flexible working opportunities they provide can benefit individuals, in the form of childcare, pursuit of other jobs, or ability to meet other plans. However, the findings of previous research have cast doubt upon whether these claims represent experiences encountered by the majority of agency workers (e.g. Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Henson, 1996; Rogers, 2000). These doubts may reflect a 'mismatch of power' between the agency worker and the third party employer in relation to the flexibility available to each. Previous research has rarely incorporated the perspective of the temporary employment agencies, and the current thesis will attempt to shed light upon the situation by discussing the relationships that recruitment consultants have with each party.

It could be argued that as a result of the current economic climate, insecurity has touched a large number of permanent jobs as well, although individuals in these positions will still possess a greater degree of protection against unfair dismissal. An individual under contract of service cannot be penalised for ending an assignment (BERR, 2009b), yet the reduced likelihood of securing an alternative job in the current climate may invalidate this flexibility. Searching for positives in the current economic climate can prove problematic, but the events outlined in chapter one of the thesis may well increase awareness of just how insecure agency work can be. This is an awareness of a situation that in the past may have taken a far greater number of individuals by surprise. As a result, the choice individuals make when joining an employment agency may well be better informed. What remains to be seen is the impact that the Agency Workers Directive will have upon the future levels of flexibility that agency employment has offered organisations in recent years. Criticisms of the Directive have been magnified by the recent economic conditions, as opponents have argued that increasing the entitlements of agency

staff will decrease the demand, damaging individual job seekers and limiting companies to more cautious business pursuits.

By outlining two clearly opposing views of the agreed adoptions of the Agency Workers Directive symbolised by the TUC and the CBI, the thesis has posed several questions: Will there be a fewer number of jobs with increased security compared with a greater number of jobs with decreased security, and if so, is this a fair sacrifice? Will companies that have previously utilised agency employment drastically alter their recruitment practice, as many have reported? And will the Directive damage the flexible workforce, or will the outcome of the Directive ultimately prove negligible? The definitive answers to these questions are unlikely to be accessible for several years, but by exploring the reactions of each of the main parties involved in the temporary employment relationship, the current thesis will aim to build an industry-wide picture of a potentially influential change in legislation. One of these perspectives is that of the individual agency worker, and the following two chapters will serve to explore the psychological impact of temporary employment for the individuals involved.

5. The Job Satisfaction and Job Security of Agency Workers

5.1. Introduction

Throughout the previous chapters, the thesis has explored several substantial characteristics of the agency employment industry. The nature of the agency working contract was described in chapter two, the various interactions and future employment implications were considered in chapter three, and the significance of flexibility for the individual and organisation was highlighted in chapter four. Temporary employment in general, and agency employment specifically, possesses several features exclusive to this form of working, and research into the area has often been concerned with assessing the effect that they can have at an individual level.

Understanding the impact that agency working can have upon the individual is a major objective of the current thesis, and the following two chapters will explore the findings and conclusions that psychological investigation has put forward in this area. In order for in-depth analysis of this research to take place, the most popular concepts present in the literature have been divided into job satisfaction and job security, which will be the subject of the current chapter, and organisational commitment and perceived organisational support, which will be considered in the following chapter.

Before exploring the findings of psychological research into the effects of agency working, the current chapter will begin by considering the lack of temporary worker-group specification, and how this can lead to difficulties in assessing and drawing comparisons between findings. The statistical surveys that were assessed in the earlier chapters clearly distinguished agency staff from other categories of temporary workers, yet several researchers in the psychological literature do not make this distinction. Ambiguity when describing temporary employees can prove problematic, and must be considered when evaluating the findings of studies which have failed to specify which temporary category its participants belong to. Job satisfaction represents one of several areas that have witnessed the treatment of temporary workers as a single homogenous group, and the chapter will continue by exploring the findings that researchers into this area have reported.

After briefly introducing job satisfaction, emphasis will shift onto the antecedents that research has identified, and how these may differ between permanent and temporary worker categories. Research has encountered difficulty when attempting to assess the levels of job satisfaction within agency worker participants, and this is reflected in the variation of findings that exist within the area. After highlighting several consequences of reduced job satisfaction that research has identified, focus will move onto the area of job security, which has also witnessed a variety of contrasting and contradictory findings in the context of temporary working. The concept of the psychological contract has been applied by research attempting to understand the variation in findings, and the chapter will continue by exploring some of the interesting conclusions that have resulted. As with job satisfaction, the antecedents of job security will be considered in the context of agency employment, and how they have translated into the findings of studies. Researchers have cast doubt upon the transferability of findings between permanent and agency worker samples in relation to the consequences of job insecurity, and the chapter will continue by exploring this argument, before summarising the major themes and implications highlighted by the current chapter.

5.2. Lack of Temporary Worker Group Specification

In chapter two, considerable variations in results were reported by surveys into the statistical distribution of agency workers, and discrepancies in agency employment literature are also prominent throughout psychological research. Several explanations for these inconsistent findings have been forwarded, and arguably the most frequently cited of these has been the ambiguity resulting from studies that have labelled the worker group of their participants simply as 'temporary', 'non-permanent', 'non-standard', or 'contingent'. Studies that have applied these rather general terms have been criticised by several researchers, who have argued that key differences may exist between worker groups who possess non-permanent contracts with their employers. This point was made by Bernhard-Oettel, Sverke, and De Witte (2005), who argued that individuals from varying forms of alternative employment have frequently been compared to permanent worker groups as a single homogeneous category.

Findings that have reported significant differences between temporary worker categories have illustrated how failing to specify between these groups can prove problematic. De Cuyper, Notelaers, and De Witte (2009) found that job insecurity related negatively with job satisfaction and organisational commitment for agency

workers and permanent workers, yet this effect was not reported to a significant degree by individuals from the fixed-term contractor group. In their study into non-standard workers, Davis-Blake, Broschak, and George (2003) also argued that temporary employees should not be generalised, as the results of participants from the contract group differed significantly with the rest of the sample of temporary workers. These findings not only indicated that participants from the two temporary worker categories differed significantly in this regard, but that the agency worker group's findings bore greater resemblance to those reported by permanent participants, and not their temporary counterparts. By failing to further divide temporary workers, studies make an inherent assumption that differences between temporary worker categories are minimal, yet findings which indicate significant differences between these temporary worker categories challenge this assumption.

The problem of failing to effectively classify categories of temporary workers can also be extended to research into contingency workers. Polivka and Nardone (1989) defined the main characteristic of contingent employment relationship as one where an individual does not hold an implicit or explicit contract for long-term employment, before highlighting the lack of an established definition that differentiated between the various categories of the group. Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2002) reported that contingent working was usually seen to embrace several different forms, including casual, agency, and fixed-term contract employment, making it highly comparable to the umbrella term of 'temporary worker' present in the UK labour force survey. Similarities also extend to research findings, as contingent employment has been associated with a variety of problems that include possible erosion of pay, decline in benefits, reduced levels of job security, inability to obtain on-the-job training, and a lack of individual loyalty towards the organisation (Polivka & Nardone, 1989). In their research into US contingent workers, Connelly and Gallagher (2004) divided workers into four groups, one of which was labelled 'temporary help service firms'. This category bears a strong resemblance to the UK agency employment industry, as the temporary help service firms described by Connelly and Gallagher (2004) operated with the similar, triangular-based contracts of employment which form the basis of an agency worker's employment in the UK.

Despite the criticism that these studies have received, dismissing the findings of research that has failed to differentiate between temporary worker categories could result in the loss of potentially insightful findings. After investigating levels of job insecurity in a sample of contingent workers, Näswall and De Witte (2003) argued that, despite grouping together individuals who represented temporary firm workers,

outsourced consultants, in-house temporaries, and independent contractors, each group could be considered less attached to the employing organisation when compared with permanent staff, and were probably more at risk of losing their jobs accordingly. Näswall and De Witte (2003) used this point to hypothesise that their temporary worker participants would report higher levels of insecurity than their permanent counterparts, and their findings supported this hypothesis. Several differences may well exist between categories of temporary worker, yet these findings indicate that different temporary worker groups still share several characteristics. The dangers of 'over-specifying' worker groups have also been highlighted, as De Cuyper and De Witte (2007) argued that definitions of specific contract types were likely to differ across countries, and thus, more general descriptions may ease cross-study comparisons. To combat the issue of over-specification, De Cuyper and De Witte (2007) identified several heterogeneity indicators that were relevant to the realm of temporary worker research the focal point of their study, which included tenure, employment prospects, and volition.

The current study will centre upon the agency workers and the reaction of permanent staff to their utilisation, yet a large body of previous studies have failed to specify which temporary or contingent worker group its participants have belonged to. Further investigation into these studies may reveal which temporary category of workers was used in the sample, and if present, this information will be highlighted. As argued by Näswall and De Witte (2003), individuals from temporary worker categories possess contracts with their employers that are based upon temporary arrangements. Therefore, findings from studies into general temporary workers will also be considered in the current and following chapter, although caution must be exercised when applying their conclusions to the agency worker group focussed upon in the current thesis.

5.3. Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is the most frequently studied variable in organisational behaviour research (Spector, 1997), and academic research into the employment of temporary workers has been no exception (Gallagher & Parks, 2001). Job satisfaction can be assessed in relation to other associated variables and outcomes, or to highlight parts of the job that cause satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Spector, 1997). Job satisfaction can be used to indicate variations between different worker groups, or to highlight differences between these groups in relation to their employment status, an example of a recognised positive correlation being that of organisational

commitment (Forde & Slater, 2006). Several studies have investigated job satisfaction in the context of temporary working to look for differences that may stem from employee contracts, and these efforts have resulted in a variety of contrasting findings.

Some studies have established higher job satisfaction amongst permanent workers compared to temporary workers (e.g. Forde & Slater 2006; Hall, 2006), whilst others have reported the opposite (e.g. De Cuyper & De Witte 2006b, 2007). Researchers have cited the motives of participants as a potential cause for these discrepancies, and have applied research designs that have taken these into account. Whilst research has divided participants into voluntary and involuntary temporary workers (e.g. Ellingson, Gruys, & Sackett, 1998), others have drawn deeper classifications, like Tan and Tan's (2002) study, which specified twenty reasons for choosing temporary agency employment. Despite such studies, it has been claimed that surprisingly little research has looked directly at the job satisfaction of workers who possess different forms of employment contract when compared with research into permanent employees (Guest, 2004). Research into the antecedents of job satisfaction has cited several variations between temporary and permanent worker groups, and the chapter will continue by exploring several of these studies.

5.3.1. Antecedents of Job Satisfaction in Agency Workers

As with many other variables, caution has been advised when assuming traditional sources of job satisfaction apply equally to individuals employed in temporary positions. A study by Torka and Schyns (2007) utilised qualitative research methods with Dutch metal workers who possessed triangular contracts of employment with the temporary employment agency and third party employer. Torka and Schyns (2007) argued that whilst traditional psychologically orientated theories were applicable to temporary agency workers, their research indicated that the job satisfaction reported by these workers also depended upon the human resource management policies offered by two 'employers', past experiences with other agencies and state employment offices, previous lay-off experiences, previous labour market experiences, and previous experiences in sectors where non-permanent employment relationships have a long-standing tradition. The utilisation of qualitative methods undoubtedly facilitated a greater understanding of the differences between agency and permanent workers, as the application of the more commonly used quantitative variables of job satisfaction may fail to take these worker-group differences into account. Torka and Schyns (2007, p. 453) were also

able to identify the individuals who would appreciate the characteristics of agency employment best, including: "...those that show a high degree of occupational self-efficacy, those who are sensation seekers, those whose experience with agency work has been positive, and those who give priority to other commitments and pursuits.". When concluding their research, Torka and Schyns (2007) argued that agencies and employers needed to treat agency workers in the same way as permanent staff if they wanted to keep them satisfied.

One antecedent relevant to agency working relates to whether an individual inhabits a temporary position voluntarily or involuntarily. Problems have arisen in research trying to establish this distinction, as Ellingson et al (1998) argued the single dichotomous scales that many studies have applied were not sensitive enough to accurately measure individuals' reasons for pursuing temporary employment. In their investigation into employees from a temporary help service firm, Ellingson et al (1998) provided their participants with several reasons for choosing temporary agency employment, and used their responses to group them into voluntary and involuntary categories. The voluntary category of reasons included a sense of freedom, flexible hours, variety, and the potential to work for a shorter length of time. The involuntary category of reasons included job loss, difficulty finding permanent work, enforced lay-off, and a tight labour market. The absence of presumed permanent employee tenure present within Hackman and Oldham's (1975) job diagnostic survey meant it was applicable to Ellingson et al's (1998) sample, and resulting findings indicated that the involuntary temporary workers reported lower levels of overall satisfaction, as well as lower levels of co-worker and supervisor satisfaction.

Other researchers have also highlighted the importance of accounting for this variable. Krausz, Brandwein, and Fox (1995) categorised participants into permanent workers and temporary help employees, before further dividing the latter group into voluntary and involuntary. After applying a 'work satisfaction' variable to their participants, Krausz et al (1995) reported that the responses of the voluntary temporary help group indicated the highest levels of satisfaction, whilst their involuntary counterparts represented the lowest. The concern for these findings is increased in light of Amuedo-Dorantes' (2000) analysis of the Spanish labour force survey, which indicated that eighty-five per cent of temporary workers were holding their jobs because of their inability to find a permanent job, whilst only 0.4% claimed that they had been seeking a temporary job. Whilst a single voluntary/involuntary scale can undoubtedly shed light upon the motives underlying an individual's

decision to become an agency worker, other studies have listed multiple motives for pursuing agency employment (e.g. Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Feldman et al, 1994). Understanding these motives provides a contextual appreciation of the perceptions reported by agency workers, yet when attempting to assess what leads individuals into agency work, the rigidity of quantitative methods is at its most telling.

Research by Tan and Tan (2002) has attempted to overcome this rigidity, after claiming that determining whether the choice is voluntary or involuntary may not provide enough insight into an individual's decision to become a temporary agency worker. To provide increased understanding that extended beyond a 'voluntary' or 'involuntary' classification, Tan and Tan (2002) specified a further twenty reasons for choosing temporary agency employment, which were then broadly grouped into the six categories of family, economic, self-improvement, personal preference, a means to get a job, and being unable to acquire a full-time job. Tan and Tan (2002) claimed that the underlying reasons illustrated by these groups played a major part in the formulation of agency worker attitudes to their employment situation, as well as their resulting behaviour. However, over-emphasising the importance of pre-existing motives for agency employment can also prove problematic. Torka and Schyns (2007) criticised the reliance on a voluntary/involuntary dichotomy, arguing that it failed to take into account attitudes towards temporary agency work that can change from negative to positive (and vice versa). To combat this issue, Torka and Schyns (2007) identified a variety of sources that contributed to a 'temp agency work satisfaction' variable, which allowed attitudinal changes to be considered.

5.3.2. The Job Satisfaction of Agency Workers

As chapter two demonstrated, research into agency worker employment has identified several potential causes of reduced satisfaction that include a lack of contractual protection (Lavin, 2005), less favourable working conditions (Nienhüser & Matiaske, 2006), and reduced protection from external factors like market fluctuation (de Gilder, 2003). Issues such as these could be linked to psychological variables in the form of antecedents, ensuring that the argument for reduced levels of job satisfaction in these workers is justifiable. One study that supported this assertion was completed by Hall (2006), who considered the levels of job satisfaction perceived by a diverse group of Australian agency workers that spanned a variety of occupational levels across all industries. Hall (2006) highlighted a series of differences between his samples, as the agency worker participants reported lower levels of satisfaction with skill utilisation, pay, autonomy,

empowerment, the work itself, and the job overall. In contrast with industry claims, Hall (2006) also found that the surveyed agency workers were no more satisfied than their permanent counterparts in regard to the degree of flexibility they possessed with their working hours, and their balance of work and non-work commitments. Hall (2006) concluded that the workers studied did, on average, exhibit the characteristics of marginal, peripheral workers. These findings reflect Harvey's (1990) research into 'flexible accumulation', as the result will often be the creation of a 'peripheral workforce' that allows an organisation to meet the demands of flexibility placed upon them.

After analysing the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) between the years 1991-1997, Booth, Francesconi, and Frank (2002, p. 190) reported a general consensus that "...temporary jobs typically pay less, are associated with lower satisfaction in some job components and provide less work-related training.". However, in contrast with the labour force survey, the BHPS failed to classify the distinct temporary worker categories, although other studies that have specified agency workers report similar findings. After analysing findings from the labour force survey, the 'workplace employee relations' survey, and the 'working in Britain 2000' survey, Forde and Slater (2006) concluded that the agency workers in the samples indicated dissatisfaction with many aspects of their employment situation. Similar findings were reported in an unpublished thesis by Biggs (2003), who found that the agency worker sample possessed significantly lower levels of job satisfaction when compared with permanent staff who worked without the influence of agency staff.

Whilst several studies have linked the difficulties experienced by agency workers with feelings of dissatisfaction, other research has indicated the importance of individual preference and motive in the formulation of these perceptions. In their conclusion, Krausz et al (1995) described how their results showed that the overall higher satisfaction of those who preferred being temporary help employees stemmed from intrinsic aspects, such as flexibility of work arrangements, social variety, and growth opportunities. Benefits such as these have been forwarded by research, agency employment industry advocates, and organisations that incorporate agency workers into their workforce. As mentioned earlier, Krausz et al (1995) also recorded lower levels of job satisfaction in involuntary temporary help employees, suggesting that an individual's control over whether they worked in a non-standard employment setting greatly affected their attitude to the job.

Previous studies have provided evidence for significant differences in job satisfaction between agency workers and their permanent counterparts, but prior research has indicated that such differences may not exist. A study conducted by Feather and Rauter (2004) into the levels of job satisfaction experienced by permanent and contingent teaching staff found no significant differences between the two groups. Despite being classified as 'involuntary' contingent workers, the participants in Feather and Rauter's (2004) sample could still be considered distinct from the involuntary temporary staff from other studies (e.g. Ellingson et al, 1998). Feather and Rauter (2004) reported that individuals were motivated to secure permanent transitions into teaching, which could suggest that feelings of satisfaction and control were increased due to the participants' positions in their desired career paths. This may contrast with involuntary temporary workers from other studies, as any permanent transitions desired by these participants may have been into very different vocations. A study by De Cuyper and De Witte (2006b) also reported similar findings to Feather and Rauter (2004), stating that in line with previous research, no significant differences between temporary workers and permanent workers were reported in relation to job satisfaction, although fixed-term contractors dominated their temporary worker sample. Such studies indicate that simple quantitative categorisation may prove inadequate for understanding the motives of agency workers, and therefore limit the insight of research into resulting experiences.

5.3.3. Implications of Job Satisfaction for Agency Workers

As the most frequently studied variable in organisational behaviour research, job satisfaction has been associated with a wide range of implications, with job performance receiving attention from a vast body of literature (Millward, 2005). In relation to permanent workers, there is an assumption that satisfied employees stay longer, are absent less, and perform better (Millward, 2005), although research outside the realm of permanent employment has been less clear. Several consequences are listed in Spector's (1997) model of job satisfaction, which include job performance, organisational citizenship behaviour, withdrawal behaviour, burnout, physical and psychological well-being, counterproductive behaviour, and life satisfaction. Whilst the model focuses upon permanent employees, antecedents are split into environmental and individual factors, offering a flexibility that could make it more suitable for appraising agency workers in comparison to other theoretical models within the academic literature. Other work has also highlighted the importance of job satisfaction in relation to various different variables. After

conducting a meta-analysis into research concerning job satisfaction, Judge and Bono (2001) reported that the concept significantly and positively correlated with self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, internal locus of control, and emotional stability.

Unsurprisingly, the findings discussed above only offer a mere snapshot of the variety of implications linked to job satisfaction, but caution must be exercised when transferring permanent worker findings to temporary worker categories. Individuals employed in agency worker roles may possess varying motives and fewer expectations in comparison with permanent workers, suggesting that negative reaction to reduced satisfaction in these workers may be far less pronounced. The short-term tenures inherent in agency worker roles may greatly reduce the amount of time lower levels of job satisfaction have to manifest into observable behaviour, and individuals who treat agency work as a 'stopgap' to alternative employment may view poor satisfaction as an expected consequence of their employment. This perception may be held by a substantial number of agency staff, as analysis of the labour force survey indicated that nearly twenty-six per cent of agency workers were looking for a new job compared with fewer than five per cent of permanent workers.

5.4. Job Security

As with job satisfaction, chapter two highlighted several potential issues inherent in agency working that may negatively impact upon perceptions of job security. Perhaps the most notable of these is the lack of protection inherent in the contract of employment possessed by agency workers. The nature of agency employment is a cause for complication in the literature relating to job security, as short tenures, high turnover rates, and the potential for numerous assignments over a relatively short period of time may reduce the validity of more traditional measures of job security. Anticipation of unemployment, created by the threat of job loss, is the core element of an objective conceptualisation, yet temporary employment is typically limited in duration by its very definition, and could be viewed as an indicator of an objective operationalisation of job insecurity as a result (De Witte & Näswall, 2003). One avenue of research that has been strongly linked with worker perceptions of job security is that of the psychological contract, and this concept will now be considered in relation to agency workers.

5.4.1. The Psychological Contract

When applied to a standard employment relationship, the theory of the psychological contract concerns the subjective beliefs that an employee associates with the exchange agreement they make with their employer. Rousseau (2001) highlighted one of the major features of the concept as the individual's belief that an agreement is mutual, as a common understanding exists that binds the parties involved to a particular course of action. Transferring findings from permanent worker samples proves problematic, as reductions in job security are less likely to contradict the psychological contracts dominant among individuals employed on a temporary basis (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006; Mauno, Kinnunen, Mäkikangas, & Nätti, 2005). However, further research has addressed this concern by classifying types of psychological contract into relational and transactional, in order to better represent the expectations held by individuals towards their employers. This has facilitated research into temporary worker samples, which has claimed that the psychological contracts of permanent workers may include more relational entitlements when compared with the psychological contracts of temporary workers (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006b; Millward & Brewerton, 1999). Despite their findings, Millward and Brewerton (1999) also argued that the transactional tendencies more prominent in the temporary contract did not prohibit relational aspirations forming within the temporary staff.

When focussing upon the temporary category of agency workers, the triangular contract of employment will typically complicate potential findings, and must therefore be taken into account. After applying the concept of the psychological contract to the three parties involved in the employment of agency workers, Claes (2005) concluded that temporary employment agency and the third party employer perceived their promises made and kept to be more favourable than the individual agency workers did. Comparisons can be drawn with the findings of Druker and Stanworth (2004), as they also suggested the existence of a discrepancy between the high expectations of third party employers and the limited rewards they offer individual agency workers. The perceived lack of understanding indicated by these findings was also present in research by Feldman et al (1994), as participants reported several key concerns that included easy discouragement due to dehumanising and impersonal treatment in the job, insecurity about their employment and future, worry of a lack of insurance and benefits, and a perceived lack of understanding from the third party employer in relation to their temporary job assignment.

One argument forwarded by researchers for the increased likelihood of relational promises forming between permanent workers and their employers when compared to temporary staff is the length of engagement experienced by the worker, as a greater duration of contract is more typically associated with permanent contracts of employment (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006b). In contrast, transactional psychological contract entitlements focus upon short-term monetary exchange and reward, and are therefore considered more dominant in the psychological contract which exists between agency workers and the third party employer. These promises typically evolve over a specific, short-term period, suggesting they are more likely to form part of the psychological contract held by temporary workers, or at least shared between permanent workers and temporary workers (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006b; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007).

Research has also claimed that an organisation's long-term reliance upon transactional promises may cause permanent workers to react negatively, whilst short-term temporary employees would be less likely to react in this manner (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006b). Research by Guest (2004) corroborated these findings, as temporary workers on more narrow and transactional psychological contracts have often reported the state of their psychological contracts as at least as positive, and sometimes more positive, than permanent workers. Guest (2004) argued that this may be due to a temporary worker preference for easy-to-monitor psychological contracts that were narrower and more transactional than relational contracts. In conclusion, Guest (2004) warned that only a limited number of studies had explored the relationship between employment contracts and the psychological contract.

Whilst the promises inherent in the psychological contract of individuals can be distinguished between transactional and relational, similarities between the consequences of breaching these promises still exist. De Cuyper and De Witte (2007) unsurprisingly found that job insecurity was perceived as a breach of relational psychological contract entitlements, which in turn reduced job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and life satisfaction. However, similar findings were also reported when transactional promises were breached, prompting De Cuyper and De Witte (2007) to suggest the application of an aggregate psychological contract measure rather than a dual measure of the psychological contract. De Cuyper, Rigotti, De Witte, and Mohr (2008) voiced similar sentiments by questioning whether or not these contracts were mutually distinct types, or whether they were actually variations of an underlying dimension of a psychological contract. It is therefore unsurprising that De Cuyper and De Witte (2007) accused the construction of

psychological theories of being inadequate to fully understand the association between contract type and job insecurity.

5.4.2. Antecedents of Job Insecurity in Agency Workers

As chapter two highlighted, only a basic understanding of the agency employment industry is required when gathering potential causes of job insecurity. It could be argued that the perceived lack of support and protection often associated with the contractual arrangements of agency work (e.g. Hodgkiss, 2004; Lavin, 2005; McMullen, 2007) may translate into feelings of job insecurity in the minds of agency workers. This argument is further supported when combined with the disparaging claims aimed at the support networks available to agency workers made by several different sources, including trade unions, political supporters of legislative change, and academic researchers. Such criticism is made all the more fervent by research that has concluded that the level of treatment experienced by the individual has often depended upon the worker's contractual status held with the organisation (Biggs, Burchill, & Millmore, 2006; Bishop, Goldsby, & Neck, 2001; Booth et al, 2002; Druker & Stanworth, 2004). Trade unions could represent one avenue of support, as their purpose is to further the economic interests of their members by negotiating on their behalf over terms and conditions of employment (Hammer & Avgar, 2005). However, Druker and Stanworth (2004) found that none of the agency workers they spoke to had joined, or were asked to join, a trade union during their period of 'temping'; a situation that is by no means uncommon. Agency staff working in close proximity to their permanent counterparts may view their own treatment as unfair and discriminatory, and perceptions of job security and organisational support are likely to suffer as a result.

The ease of dismissal facilitated by the agency worker contract could also result in less protection from the repercussions of market downturns. After surveying several temporary worker categories in the Netherlands, Hesselink and Vuuren (1999) reported that employees with temporary employment contracts, and workers from a temporary employment agency, worried most about their future employability in comparison to part-time and full-time employees with permanent contracts. However, the presence of the temporary employment agency may offset this concern, as they will aim to achieve the mutually beneficial situation of keeping their agency staff in work.

As with job satisfaction, the intentions and expectations of future employment held by employees on temporary contracts can also affect the perceptions and

consequences of job insecurity held by that individual. Research into Dutch agency workers by Torka and Schyns (2007) challenged the assumption of undesirability that many have attributed to this form of employment. After receiving complaints from permanent staff that their agency counterparts were earning a larger salary, the organisation, who did not want to raise the salary of their permanent employees, presented the three agency workers in question with a choice: accept a permanent contract or leave the company. The agency workers, who had worked for the company continuously for several years, chose to leave after refusing the company's contract offer, which included reduced salary and increased 'company security'. This decision poses several interesting questions relating to sacrifice. Some agency workers may desire the increased security that accompanies permanent positions, yet others may place greater emphasis upon more transactional, short-term rewards like pay, and view any resulting insecurity as a fair trade. Pre-assignment interaction with the agency may also prove influential, as recruitment consultants should provide the individual with information regarding the predicted length and security inherent in the assignment. Incorporating the perspective of the recruitment consultant will allow the thesis to identify whether such an interaction occurs.

Whilst some agency workers may prefer the greater degree of flexibility that agency employment proclaims to offer, others see it merely as a transitional phase into a permanent role, and findings suggest that this motive can greatly influence perceptions of job security. Contingent employees who assess their chance of receiving a permanent or renewed contract as high may anticipate relational psychological contract entitlements (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). As a result, these workers may react in a similar manner to permanent staff when encountering reduced job security, and when failing to secure future employment. Research has also suggested that a successful transition could significantly alter individual perceptions. A longitudinal study by Parker, Griffin, Sprigg, and Wall (2002) tracked the progress of seventy-five involuntary temporary workers who transitioned into permanent employment. The short-term temporary workers reported lower levels of job security than their permanent counterparts, yet these levels soon increased once these workers had successfully transitioned into permanent roles (Parker et al, 2002). The researchers also noted that this increase occurred over a period when other pre-existing permanent workers reported reduced job security, suggesting that an individual's possession of a permanent contract can positively impact upon perceptions of job security.

5.4.3. The Job Security of Agency Workers

The precarious nature of the agency working contract could suggest that workers who possess them would perceive reduced levels of security as a result, and several psychological studies have supported this argument. Findings from qualitative interviews performed by Druker and Stanworth (2004) included a number of reported experiences of participants being brutally axed by the third party employer. This was personified by one individual who had been suddenly and unexpectedly told three weeks into a five week assignment that their services were no longer required. Experiences like these can instil a climate of uncertainty that other research has also identified. The study into contingent teachers based in Australia by Feather and Rauter (2004) reported that their participants described greater feelings of job insecurity compared to the equivalent workers from the permanent sample, and permanent staff surveyed in Allan and Sienko's (1997) research scored significantly higher levels for satisfaction with job security in comparison with the study's various contingency worker groups. Booth et al (2002) found that the temporary worker categories of casual and seasonal staff with promotion prospects reported lower levels of job security, whilst Forde and Slater (2006) reported similar findings during their study into UK agency employment, as their agency worker participants exhibited higher levels of anxiety about their positions.

Research has also identified discrepancies between the promises made by temporary employment agencies and the experiences of individuals. The agencies approached in Hall's (2006) study into Australian agency working reported that a small portion converted to permanent work, and over half were offered back-to-back agency engagements. The security implied by these claims was not mirrored in the responses of the study's agency worker sample, as individuals reported significantly higher levels of job insecurity in comparison to their permanent worker counterparts (Hall, 2006). The perception of continued employment is undoubtedly central to feelings of insecurity, and temporary worker categories are more likely to possess fewer assurances about their future work. Rogers (2000, p. 49) reported her encounter with this belief, stating that: "Many temporary workers I interviewed expressed feelings of insecurity regarding the unpredictable flow of temporary assignments.". After dividing their sample into permanent workers, fixed-term contractors, and temporary agency workers, De Cuyper et al (2009) reported that the samples of fixed-term and temporary agency workers reported higher levels of job insecurity than their permanent participants.

Other studies have considered the levels of job insecurity perceived by temporary employees in the context of the demand control model. Several researchers have argued that individuals employed on temporary terms unsurprisingly exerted lower levels of influence in their places of work (Aronsson, Gustafsson, & Dallner, 2002; Parker et al, 2002), and when paired with high demand, low job control has been associated with impaired mental health, higher levels of job-induced tension, and higher levels of job insecurity for workers employed on non-permanent contracts (Bernhard-Oettel et al, 2005). These findings led the researchers to conclude that subjective perceptions of job conditions were stronger predictors of employee health and well-being when compared with objective conditions like contract status. The transferability of these findings to temporary agency workers is limited, as workers from this temporary category were not represented in the non-permanent sample. Bernhard-Oettel et al (2005) also reported that the organisational tenure of workers appeared to be relatively long, which is likely to contrast with the experiences of the majority of agency workers.

Despite the body of research indicating reduced levels of job insecurity for agency employees and other temporary worker categories, consensus has not been reached, as other findings have contrasted with, and even contradicted this viewpoint. Individual motives and intentions are often viewed as a possible explanation for these contradictions, as it has been argued that job security may not be as integral to the expectations held by temporary workers when compared with permanent workers (De Cuyper, De Jong, De Witte, Isaksson, Rigotti & Schalk, 2008).

The results of De Cuyper and De Witte (2007) seem to support this argument, as the influence of job insecurity appeared to vary between the permanent and fixed-term contractor samples. Application of a four-item insecurity scale previously developed by De Witte indicated significant differences between the two samples, as job insecurity correlated negatively with job satisfaction and organisational commitment for permanent workers, yet these associations were not present in the fixed-term worker sample. Similar findings indicating the variation of reactions between permanent and temporary workers were reported in previous research by De Cuyper and De Witte (2006b) and De Witte and Näswall (2003), and Bernhard-Oettel et al's (2005) study reported that high job insecurity was associated with raised job induced tension for permanent workers, but not temporary participants. De Cuyper and De Witte (2007) perceived findings like these in the context of the psychological contract, arguing that high levels of job insecurity were considered a

breach of the relational elements that were more likely to be inherent in the understanding possessed by permanent workers.

These conclusions indicate a significant difference between permanent and temporary participants, although the temporary category of agency workers was not represented in any of these studies. After accounting for this worker group in a future study, De Cuyper et al (2009) reported findings which contrasted with the hypothesis derived from these previous studies. After applying the same four-item variable of job insecurity utilised in previous research, results indicated that job insecurity correlated negatively with perceptions of job satisfaction and employability (which concerns the employee's perception about their possibility to achieve a new job) in the agency worker participant group. The researchers concluded by claiming that this finding challenged assumptions linked with the flexible working arrangements of temporary agency employment, as although these workers are at the organisation's periphery and permanent staff are at the organisation's core, they may display similar reactions to job insecurity (De Cuyper et al, 2009).

In later work, De Cuyper and De Witte (2008) reiterated the importance of the psychological contract in accounting for differences between permanent and temporary workers in relation to job insecurity. The argument that temporary employees place more emphasis on transactional rewards (e.g. pay, bonuses) than relational ones (e.g. job security) casts doubt upon the ill effects of job insecurity for temporary workers that previous research has described, as the negative consequences of these perceptions may be far less damaging when compared to permanent workers. This appears to be a logical argument, but an agency worker's perception of their 'employment cycle' may also be significant. The assignment-based nature of agency work may provide individuals with experience of alternating employment arrangements that serve to limit the worker's investment in individual assignments and organisations. In contrast, permanent workers are more likely to rely upon far fewer sources of employment throughout their careers, and the resulting lack of 'job-seeking' experience may translate into increased negative reaction resulting from any perceived threats to their employment status.

5.4.4. Implications of Job Insecurity for Agency Workers

Research into the effects of job insecurity on permanent worker samples has outlined a series of negative consequences. After carrying out a literature review into studies focussing upon job insecurity, De Witte (1999) stated that job insecurity reduced psychological well-being and job satisfaction, and increased psychosomatic

complaints and physical strains. The negative influence of job insecurity was also reported by Cheng and Chan (2008), who carried out a literature review of one hundred and thirty-three studies that included one hundred and seventy-two independent samples. Upon completion of the analysis, Cheng and Chan (2008) reported that job insecurity related negatively to job satisfaction, organisational commitment, physical and psychological health, work performance, trust, and job involvement, and a positive correlation was also found with the turnover intentions of participants. Cheng and Chan (2008) also reported that employees who were younger, and who possessed shorter tenures, were more likely to experience turnover intentions as a result of job insecurity when compared to employees with longer tenure, as their psychological investment in the organisation was likely to be lower. A negative association between job insecurity and health was also found to be stronger amongst employees with longer tenure than employees with shorter tenure (Cheng & Chan, 2008).

Transferring psychological findings between permanent and temporary worker categories is problematic, and the area of job insecurity is no different. Difficulty can arise due to the contract of employment, which can strongly affect the antecedents and consequences of job insecurity and how they impact upon the individual. Variations in the reaction of permanent and temporary worker groups were indicated by several studies explored in the previous section (e.g. Bernhard-Oettel et al, 2005; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006b; De Witte & Näswall, 2003), with discrepancies frequently attributed to the differing emphases inherent in the psychological contracts possessed by workers. The influence of pre-held motives and expectations may also indicate a possible cause of these reported differences, and these motives will represent a primary focus of the thesis.

Despite the highlighting of withdrawal cognitions as a negative consequence to perceived insecurity, Storrie (2002) argued that turnover outcomes represented a weaker predictor for agency workers when compared to their permanent counterparts, as individuals attracted to this form of labour may exhibit a lower level of commitment towards labour force participation. Agency workers will typically hold a position on the periphery of a company's workforce, and an increased susceptibility to job loss is an unsurprising consequence. In contrast, research by Parker et al (2002) argued that residing on the periphery may protect individuals from some of the stressful role demands experienced by the core workforce. After carrying out a covariate analysis, Parker et al's (2002) findings supported this argument. The positive consequences of temporary status on role demands were

found to outweigh the negative effects of reduced job security and participative decision making, resulting in an overall effect of temporary worker groups experiencing less job strain. Turnover, either actual or intended, has been a measure regularly associated with a series of variables in permanent workers, but transferring findings to agency worker samples may prove difficult. Pre-existing underlying motives like the desire for an employment stopgap or need for extra short-term cash flow may be responsible for a worker's decision to leave employment, and the individual's perceptions of the job may have little bearing on the decision at all. As a result, caution must be exercised when assessing the negative outcomes of job insecurity in relation to agency workers, if such perceptions are observed.

5.5. Summary and Conclusions

The existence of similarities between temporary worker categories has been used to justify greater generalisation and reduced categorisation, although characteristics specific to the agency worker category can limit the transfer of findings between these sample groups. Perhaps the most notable of these is the inclusion of two employing organisations resulting from the triangular contract, and the influence of this characteristic will be assessed in greater detail at the beginning of the following chapter. Research has indicated that differences exist between distinct temporary worker categories (e.g. De Cuyper et al, 2009), further supporting the argument that temporary agency workers should be categorised and viewed as a distinct sample, and not as part of a homogenous temporary worker group. This will inform the participant selection process of the current thesis, as agency employees will represent the only category of temporary workers involved in the study.

The lack of temporary worker group specification represents one of several potential difficulties encountered by research, along with motivational differences, and whether individuals reside in agency positions voluntarily. Establishing the latter has represented a problematic obstacle for studies that have applied quantitative-based research designs, as increasingly complex methods have been demanded by researchers. Various findings have been reported in relation to the levels of job satisfaction and job security perceived by agency workers and other temporary categories of worker, and research has struggled to encompass measures that account for each of these influences. These problems have been reflected in the variation of findings in the context of job satisfaction. Some studies have established comparatively low levels of job satisfaction in agency workers (e.g. Forde & Slater

2006; Hall, 2006), but others have reported the opposite (e.g. De Cuyper & De Witte 2006b, 2007).

These discrepancies have also been mirrored in research into the levels of job security exhibited by temporary worker categories. Job insecurity has been described as the anticipation of unemployment, yet this view of the concept has emerged from permanent worker research. The very nature of temporary work ensures that this anticipation is inherent in the experiences of agency staff, suggesting that more flexible methods of enquiry may be needed. An increasing body of literature has also considered the influence of the psychological contract, and how it differs between permanent and temporary worker groups. The concept of the psychological contract has provided research with an opportunity to account for the perceptions that individuals from different worker groups hold towards their employing organisations and their job roles, and the chapter considered several of the interesting findings that have resulted.

Increased understanding is undoubtedly required, as several researchers have indicated the presence of increased job insecurity in agency workers (e.g. Hall, 2006; Rogers, 2000), whereas others have claimed that job security may not be as integral to the expectations held by these workers (e.g. De Cuyper et al, 2008). Applying the concept of the psychological contract has shed light upon the mutual expectations of agency workers, and how they may vary from the expectations possessed by permanent staff. This concept suggests that individuals who are motivated to seek short-term employment opportunities through agency work would be less likely to form relational promises with their employers. As a result, understanding the motives workers possess for approaching temporary employment agencies represents a significant focus of the current thesis, as these motives could prove influential to the perceptions agency workers attribute towards their jobs. The contrasting findings of research into job satisfaction and job security provide a strong indication of the complexity inherent in the temporary agency working arrangements possessed by individuals, and may even cast doubt upon the suitability of quantitative approaches in understanding this form of working. The thesis will therefore apply more flexible forms of enquiry to address these discrepancies.

The current chapter represents the first half of the psychological literature review that will inform the methods of enquiry in the thesis. Particular focus has been placed upon understanding the perceptions that individual agency workers possess

towards their jobs, and how these may influence behaviour in the workplace. The following chapter will conclude the thesis's psychological literature review on temporary agency workers by shifting focus to the perceptions agency workers hold towards their two employing organisations. This will be achieved by exploring the findings of previous research into the levels of organisational commitment and perceived organisational support exhibited by agency staff.

6. The Organisational Commitment and Perceived Organisational Support of Agency Workers

6.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, research into the perspectives that agency workers held in relation to their jobs was scrutinised, with particular focus upon the psychological variables of job satisfaction and job security. The present chapter represents the second half of the thesis's literature review of the psychological research applied to temporary working arrangements. In contrast to the previous chapter focus upon perceptions of the job, the current chapter will focus upon perceptions of the organisations involved in temporary worker employment, namely the third party employer and the temporary employment agency. The organisational commitment and perceived organisational support experienced by agency workers is integral to the overall aims of the thesis, most notably in the form of increased understanding into the psychological consequences of agency working and the various interactions that exist between the major parties of the agency employment industry. In order to assess the literature in this area, the chapter will focus predominantly upon the psychological variables of organisational commitment and perceived organisational support.

Prior to exploring the findings of psychological research, the current chapter will begin by outlining the importance of the triangular contract of employment possessed by agency workers. The arrangement incorporates two 'employers', and this has created complexity that resulting research has attempted to account for. One concept that the employment arrangement has become problematic for is that of organisational commitment, and the chapter will continue by exploring the findings of research that has focussed upon permanent and agency worker samples. The concept of perceived organisational support has received less attention than other psychological variables, yet findings from varying worker groups indicate a potentially interesting avenue of research in relation to agency employees. The chapter will continue by exploring the findings and conclusions of research into perceived organisational support, before concluding with a summary of the chapter.

6.2. Difficulties with the Triangular Contract

The lack of specification inherent in studies referring to temporary worker categories was highlighted in the previous chapter as a potential barrier to understanding the perceptions that agency employees possessed towards their jobs. It is clear that several similarities exist between these worker groups, yet research has also indicated that differences between these groups are also present (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007; Näswall & De Witte, 2003). Perhaps the most prominent feature that distinguishes agency work from other forms of temporary employment is the possession of a triangular contract, as this creates a dual employer relationship. The current chapter shifts emphasis to the employee-employer relationship by considering findings from studies into the organisational commitment and perceived organisational support of agency staff and other temporary worker groups. In order to better understand these psychological concepts in relation to the agency employment industry, the current chapter will begin by considering how the triangular contract of employment can influence the formulation of these perceptions.

Variables relating to organisational commitment have frequently been applied to a variety of permanent and temporary worker group samples, yet the validity of transferring findings to agency workers is several limited by the existence of the temporary employment agency and third party employer. Put simply, variables that would typically attempt to highlight and quantify perceptions of organisational commitment in a 'standard' two-way employment relationship between the employer and the employee may need to evolve in order to take the three parties involved in the temporary employment relationship into account (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). The existence of the temporary employment agency and third party employer can complicate the investigation (Gallagher & Parks, 2001), and resulting reports of the agency worker's organisational commitment may prove inaccurate and misleading.

This issue is addressed by Hesselink and Vuuren (1999), who argued that agency workers were likely to demonstrate less commitment towards the temporary employment agency in comparison to the third party employer where they work. This argument is justified by the limited contact between the agency and the individual, as the agency only arranges the work and pays the wages (Hesselink & Vuuren, 1999). However, dismissing the impact that the temporary employment agency can have upon its agency workers can prove costly, as they may provide individuals with challenging assignments that create new opportunities for learning

(Torka & Schyns, 2007). Other research has argued that an individual's perceptions of commitment towards their agency and employing organisation are linked. Reports from Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow's (2006) sample led them to suggest that an individual's affective commitment towards their temporary employment agency also influenced perceptions of affective commitment that they held towards their third party employer. Affective commitment represented one of three components in Allen and Meyer's (1991) model of organisational commitment, and has been defined as the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1991).

6.3. Organisational Commitment

Along with job satisfaction, organisational commitment is one of the most studied variables in both the practitioner and academic literature (Gallagher & Parks, 2001). Organisational commitment is frequently applied to permanent worker samples possessing open-ended contracts of employment, although research has also cited the potential importance of instilling greater levels of organisational commitment in workers employed in temporary forms of employment. Fuller, Barnett, Hester, and Relyea (2003) described commitment as an exchange commodity, as people were more likely to become committed to an organisation when they felt that the organisation was committed to them. Researchers have applied quantitative methods to examine the levels of commitment possessed by agency workers, and whether these differ from their permanent worker counterparts. In order to increase understanding in this area, research has also begun to specify and differentiate feelings of commitment between agency workers' employment agencies, and the third party employers where they are placed on assignment (Connelly, Gallagher, & Matthew Gilley, 2007). The current chapter will continue by identifying and considering the antecedents of organisational commitment, and the role they can play in the commitment agency workers demonstrate towards their agencies and third party employers.

6.3.1. The Antecedents of Organisational Commitment in Agency Workers

The importance of motive and choice was demonstrated in the previous chapter in relation to feelings of job satisfaction and job security, and its role as an influential antecedent is also present in research into the levels of organisational commitment possessed by temporary worker groups. Von Hippel, Mangum, Greenberger, Heneman, and Skoglund (1997) found that the voluntary temporary agency workers

in their sample reported higher levels of commitment to their organisations when compared with their involuntary counterparts. Other research has also cited the importance of whether an individual has voluntarily chosen agency work. After creating variables of 'Voluntariness' and 'Involuntariness', Connelly et al (2007) reported that agency worker ratings of 'Voluntariness' positively correlated with feelings of organisational commitment towards the temporary employment agency, but not the third party employer. The findings also indicated that an agency worker's preference for permanent employment related to levels of continuance commitment (i.e. the desire for continued employment) they displayed towards their temporary agencies. Connelly et al (2007) concluded that the workers who had actively chosen temporary agency work were more likely to form an emotional bond with their temporary agencies, perhaps because of a positive leader-member exchange relationship in which supervisors at the agency gave more opportunities to workers who were believed to be more interested in agency working. Increased levels of affective commitment towards the agency were also attributed to the feelings of gratitude that agency workers may display upon receiving assignments that were either high in quality or quantity (Connelly et al, 2007). By dividing perceptions of commitment towards the two employers, psychological enquiry can better understand the relationship that forms between the individual and the temporary employment agency. Previous analyses have been limited to the point of view of the agency worker, but incorporating multiple perspectives into the research design analysis will enable the thesis to also account for the viewpoint of the recruitment consultant.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, methods for distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary workers have been called into question. Ellingson, Gruys, and Sackett (1998) voice their concern by arguing that the use of a single dichotomous scale to assess whether a temporary worker is voluntary or involuntary is inadequate. Similar doubts have been raised regarding the simplicity of labelling an individual as a 'voluntary' agency worker. Although the term implies free choice, research by De Jong, De Cuyper, De Witte, Silla, and Bernhard-Oettel (2009, p. 247) has argued that: "Voluntary acceptance of temporary employment does not necessarily imply a positive attitude towards temporary employment: rather, it might reflect perceptions of future or permanent job opportunities". Interactions between the agency worker and the third party employer have also been highlighted as influential to feelings of commitment, as research in the US by Newton (1996) indicated that one of the key methods that organisations could employ in raising the

commitment of its temporary workers was the provision of feedback on aspects relating to the job. This finding is clearly applicable to the conclusion of an assignment, but Druker and Stanworth's (2004) research into UK agency workers reported that, despite frequent opportunities to do so, companies rarely commented on, or evaluated, the performance of their agency workers.

Druker and Stanworth (2004) regard this as an indication of low commitment on behalf of the third party employer, but other research has argued that the negative consequences which may originate from this event may well be offset by the reduced number of expectancies agency workers attribute to their employers. In their study into agency workers in Singapore, Van Dyne and Ang (1998) reported that the participants in their sample engaged in fewer 'organisational citizenship behaviours, and expected less from their employers in relation to their psychological contracts. Examples of these behaviours may include staying late to finish work or going out of the way to help a work colleague (Feather & Rauter, 2004).

Research by Von Hippel et al (1997) also indicated a potentially significant difference between agency and permanent workers with regard to how feelings of organisational commitment may form. Findings for the sample of permanent workers indicated that feelings of organisational commitment positively correlated with the degree of satisfaction that the worker possessed towards their supervisor, although similar findings were not replicated in the agency worker sample (Von Hippel et al, 1997). One explanation could be that permanent workers may place more emphasis upon their relationships with supervisors and management figures, as positive relations may improve promotional prospects or long-term assurances with the company. The perceptions of significance held towards these relationships may vary considerably between worker groups, as agency workers may be far less likely to experience, or value, the benefits that these relationships may bring. Findings like those of Von Hippel et al (1997) suggest that clear differences exist between agency and permanent workers, and that greater understanding must be reached regarding the underlying motives of individuals employed on these terms.

6.3.2. The Organisational Commitment of Agency Workers

As with job security, the temporary short-term nature of the agency employment assignment may justify the argument that agency workers will exhibit lower levels of commitment and loyalty towards the third party employer. Individuals may view this time as a transitional period in their career, and want to avoid becoming overly attached to companies that they will soon be leaving. Findings from several studies

lend weight to these assumptions, as participants from temporary worker categories have reported comparatively lower levels of commitment to their permanent counterparts. One such study was completed by De Gilder (2003), who compared the survey responses of contingent and core permanent Dutch hotel workers in relation to feelings of commitment and trust towards their employing organisation. De Gilder (2003) reported that findings supported the hypothesis, as levels of commitment and trust were significantly lower in the contingent worker sample.

Other research has presented similar results. Forde and Slater's (2006) investigation into British agency workers reported that the participants possessed little loyalty to, or pride in, the organisation they were working for, and were less likely to report a strong desire to stay with that organisation. Biggs and Swailes' (2006) study into UK-based agency workers reported similar findings, as participants exhibited significantly lower levels of organisational commitment in comparison to permanent workers. Research into German agency workers by Mitlacher (2008) indicated other negative consequences to this form of employment, citing the short duration of assignments and the significantly higher levels of labour turnover as key contributors to the lower levels of job quality reported by the study's participants.

It is generally assumed that short contract duration is negatively related to organisational commitment (Pearce 1993), and despite receiving considerable support (e.g. Forde & Slater 2006; Van Dyne & Ang 1998), results from other studies have cast doubt upon this hypothesis with findings that have contradicted this argument (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006a). A desire to secure permanent employment through agency work has been cited as a potential influence by several researchers. After reporting no significant difference between the levels of organisational commitment reported by the agency and permanent worker sample, McClurg (1999) argued that many of the agency workers were using the temporary help service experience to achieve permanent employment. Von Hippel et al (1997) forwarded similar findings after separating the temporary employment agency and the third party employer and recording the perceptions of commitment that agency workers attributed to each. Von Hippel et al (1997) reported that when individuals hoped to gain a permanent job, they displayed greater commitment towards the third party employer, yet no systematic change was demonstrated in their commitment to the temporary employment agency. A similar effect was recorded in relation to the level of satisfaction participants demonstrated towards their supervisors from within the third party organisation, and increased supervisor

satisfaction positively correlated with commitment towards the employer, but not the agency (Von Hippel et al, 1997).

Studies into the number of organisational citizenship behaviours demonstrated by temporary workers have also indicated that a desire to achieve a transition into permanent employment may influence perceptions of organisational commitment. In contrast with the findings of Van Dyne and Ang (1998), Feather and Rauter (2004) reported that the contingent workers in their sample demonstrated a greater number of organisational citizenship behaviours than their permanent counterparts. Feather and Rauter (2004, p. 81) defined organisational citizenship behaviours as: "... behaviours that help the organisation but may not be directly or explicitly recognized in the organization's formal reward system", examples of which include staying late to finish work when they are not specifically asked to do so, or helping a co-worker despite the action not being part of the role requirement of the job. Feather and Rauter (2004) attributed the contrast with Van Dyne and Ang's (1998) findings to the different motives of each sample, as their sample of contingent teachers were seeking permanent transitions into the same field.

Research has attempted to separate the temporary employment agency and third party employer as targets of an individual's organisational commitment (e.g. Von Hippel et al, 1997), although other research has attempted to account for the dual employer relationship by applying increasingly complex concepts of organisational commitment. One such study was completed by Breugal, Olffen, and Olie (2005), who divided their measures of commitment into affective commitment, i.e. the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1991), and continuance commitment, i.e. the costs that employees associate with leaving the organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1990). After accounting for these differences, Breugal et al (2005) reported that the affective commitment participants displayed towards their agency was higher than their continuance commitment, and that these levels of affective commitment were close to the average for scores recorded by workers in more traditional work settings.

The findings of Breugal et al (2005) also coincide with those of Gallagher and Parks (2001), who reported that when workers were offered assignments by more than one agency, it was likely that they would accept the assignment from the firm they felt most committed to, and gradually change their priorities in accepting offers from other agencies. In De Witte and Näswall's (2003) study into European temporary employment, the sample of heterogeneous temporary employees did not

demonstrate lower levels of job satisfaction and organisational commitment, and in some cases, displayed more of these variables, although the researchers did not differentiate between voluntary temporary workers and involuntary temporary workers. Several of the findings into the employment of temporary worker categories support the claim made by Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2002), who argued that workers were not necessarily emotionally detached from their temporary workplace. Findings like these suggest that potentially strong relationships may form between the individual and the temporary employment agency, and exploring this relationship represents an important objective of the thesis.

6.3.3. The Implications of Organisational Commitment for Agency Workers

As already stated, organisational commitment is one of the most studied variables in the academic literature (Gallagher & Parks, 2001), and this popularity has at least partially resulted from the variety of positive and negative consequences that research has attributed to this concept. Although research has focussed upon several associations, the samples of these studies have typically incorporated permanent workers in possession of standard, two-way contractual relationships with their employers. Several characteristics of agency employment limit the transferability of permanent-worker findings, including the triangular contract of employment, the increased likelihood of short-term tenures, and the potential for several assignments with varying third party employers. Despite the differences between these sample groups, implications for permanent workers may at least partially transfer to agency staff.

Claims regarding the implications and consequences that organisational commitment can have upon employees have varied, with some researchers placing more emphasis upon the concept than others. Several implications have been highlighted, but employee turnover, and the behaviours associated with it, represents the most frequently cited consequence (Cohen, 1993; Solinger, Olffen, & Roe, 2008). As well as figures for actual turnover, levels of affective commitment in permanent worker samples have negatively correlated with a variety of variables concerned with assessing an individual's desire to leave their employer, including 'desire to remain' (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993), 'turnover cognitions' (Luchak & Gellatly, 2007), and 'turnover intentions' (Geoffrey, White, & Charles, 2005).

A study into the affective commitment of permanent workers by Mohamed, Taylor, and Hassan (2006) reported a negative relationship between affective commitment

and the intent to quit. The study also demonstrated a positive relationship between affective commitment and the extent to which employees believed their organisation treated them well, valued their contributions, and cared about their well-being (Mohamed et al, 2006). Similar findings were reported by Geoffrey et al (2005), as they found a statistically negative relationship between affective organisational commitment and turnover intentions. Despite their potential usefulness in permanent worker samples, consequences like these may prove less valid for agency workers in possession of assignments with pre-defined end dates. However, employee turnover has not been the only consequence linked to organisational commitment.

Steers (1977) found that organisational commitment strongly correlated with 'desire to remain' and 'intent to remain', as well as weaker, but still significant, associations for the variables of 'attendance', 'quantity of work', and 'promotion readiness'. Another popular outcome linked to organisational commitment is that of job and work performance. Solinger et al (2008) highlighted the body of evidence that has successfully linked work performance and organisational citizenship behaviours with organisational commitment, and Luchak and Gellatly (2007) drew similar conclusions, citing a strong relationship between affective commitment and job performance.

When considering how the consequences of organisational commitment highlighted by permanent worker research may apply to agency staff, several difficulties soon emerge. The strongest and most frequently studied consequences of organisational commitment include the levels of employee turnover of the organisation and the varying turnover cognitions reported by individuals. The validity of actual employee turnover is greatly hampered in the context of agency employment, as the higher turnovers these workers are likely to experience will often result from the short-term tenures they enter into with the organisation. The lack of employment protection also makes them more susceptible to any organisational efforts to reduce the size of its workforce, further invalidating the use of employee turnover as a measure of low commitment for agency staff. The reduced level of control agency workers possess over their future employment with the third party employer also serves to impede the more traditional measures of organisational commitment utilised by research. The validity of measuring the various turnover intentions possessed by the individual is also limited, as previous chapters have suggested that agency work may be viewed by staff as an inferior and undesirable form of employment that represents nothing more than a stopgap or opportunity to secure a permanent transition.

As a result of these difficulties, findings in the realm of agency employment, and temporary employment in general, have been harder to collect. After studying company usage patterns of a variety of temporary worker categories across Europe, Tregaskis (1997) concluded that the low commitment demonstrated by these workers could contribute to high staff turnover, thus increasing recruitment costs and the time needed to establish new personnel in the job. The well-being of agency workers may represent a concern that is secondary to that of the company's permanent staff, but Tragaskis (1997) argued that the high turnover of temporary staff will often translate into long-term negative consequences for a company's profitability, and should therefore not be overlooked.

6.4. Perceived Organisational Support

Central to the thesis is the understanding of the role temporary agency agencies can adopt in providing aid, support, and opportunities for employment to a variety of individuals. Perhaps the most prominent psychological concept concerning the perceptions of support individuals attribute towards a company is that of perceived organisational support. The vast majority of previous research into the area has applied the concept to permanent worker sample groups, and the chapter will continue by exploring the theory and how it may apply to the temporary worker category of agency workers.

As discussed earlier, the concept of organisational commitment concerns the strengths of an individual's identification with, and involvement in, a particular organisation. The theory of organisational support is one that ties in strongly with organisational commitment, and the two have been found to positively correlate to a significant degree (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002). When explaining the reportedly strong correlation between organisational commitment and perceived organisational support, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002, p. 710) argued that: "Evidently, employees strongly reciprocate indications of the organization's caring and positive valuation by increasing their emotional bond to the organization."

The concept of perceived organisational support relates strongly with the theory of reciprocity, as Gouldner (1960) argued that if one person treats another well, the reciprocity norm obliges the return of favourable treatment. The concept of perceived organisational support supposes that, in order to determine an organisation's readiness to reward increased work effort and to meet socio-

emotional needs, employees develop global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well being (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002), and these beliefs are referred to as perceived organisational support. In other words, perceived organisational support refers to the employer's commitment to the employee (Eisenberger et al, 1986).

Unsurprisingly, employees greatly value the support of their organisation, as it can lead to benefits which include approval and respect, pay and promotion, access to information, and other forms of aid that allow the individual to better carry out their job (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In short, perceived organisational support plays an important role in the process of commitment, as it helps to explain how basic work experiences influence affective commitment and, ultimately, employee withdrawal behaviour (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001).

6.4.1. Personification of the Organisation

Before applying the concept of perceived organisational support to temporary agency workers, consideration must first be given to the personification of the organisation, which represents a prominent influence in the perceptions of support. Significant work into the area by Levinson (1965) claimed that the personification of the organisation is abetted by several factors that include: (a) the legal, moral, and financial responsibility possessed by the organisation for the actions of its agents; (b) the organisational precedents, traditions, policies, and norms that provide continuity and prescribe role behaviours; and (c) the power exerted by the organisation, through its agents, over its individual employees.

In order to understand a personified organisation's readiness to reward increased work effort and to meet needs for praise and approval, employees develop global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well being (Eisenberger et al, 1986). The personification of the organisation also informs the employee's view of their organisation's treatment, as they view their favourable or unfavourable treatment as an indication that the organisation either favours or disfavors them (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The degree of personification is such that Levinson (1965) argued that actions taken by agents of the organisation were often viewed as indications of the organisation's intent, rather than attributed solely to the agents' personal motive.

Levinson argued that personification of the organisation stemmed from the concept of transference originally outlined by Freud (1912, as cited in Levinson, 1965), as

people project human qualities upon organisations and then relate to them as if organisations did in fact have human qualities. Levinson (1965, p. 377) continued by arguing that individuals "...generalize from their feelings about people in the organization who are important to them, to the organization as a whole, as well as extrapolating from those attitudes they bring to the organization." Concepts like transference are gleaned from clinical psychology, and as a result, only account for one side of a dual relationship (Levinson, 1965). Despite this, research into perceived organisational support considers both sides of the employee-employer relationship, as work on perceived organisational support has stemmed from the application of social exchange theory in organisational settings (Wayne et al, 2002), and focuses on the exchange relationship between the employee and the organisation. A strong link with organisational commitment allows perceived organisational support to effectively focus upon the exchange relationship that takes place, as preceding economic and affective interpretations may integrate and extend into a social exchange approach that emphasises an employee's perception of the organisation's commitment towards them (Eisenberger et al, 1986).

6.4.2. Antecedents of Perceived Organisational Support for Agency Workers

Unsurprisingly, the strongest antecedent to perceived organisational support is the degree of support and favourable treatment organisations demonstrate towards their employees. After completing a meta-analysis of over seventy journals that focussed on the perceived organisational support of permanent workers, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) outlined three general forms of perceived favourable treatment, which included fairness, supervisor support, and organisational rewards and job conditions. Work into the underlying causes of perceived organisational support in permanent workers by Freund (2005) found that employees who perceived their organisation to be rewarding their efforts with financial benefits, appreciation, and interest in the job, or employees who felt that the organisation's goals correspond with their own personal aspirations, would tend to stay in the organisation and would contribute to achieving the organisational aims and goals. When summarising their findings into perceived organisational support, Rhoades et al (2001) argued that organisational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support were associated with both perceived organisational support and affective commitment. Research by Preuss (2002) also found that workers who perceived that managers would, in good faith, make attempts to secure jobs in the firm, would

respond with an increase in levels of satisfaction and commitment towards the company.

Perceived organisational support has also been found to correlate with several other variables. A study on permanent workers by Wayne et al (2002) found that perceived organisational support significantly correlated with procedural justice (whether work-related decisions are based on the gathering of accurate and unbiased information, employee voice, and an appeals process), distributive justice (the extent to which employees have been fairly awarded given their job responsibilities), experience, education and training, stresses and strains of the job, inclusion (how well the company fulfilled its obligations to the employee), recognition (asked to compare themselves to others with about the same tenure at the company on aspects of recognition), contingent rewards (employees rated the degree to which they received contingent rewards from their immediate supervisor), and non-contingent punishment. Antecedents like these often originate from research into permanent worker samples, but applying them to agency worker groups in light of other findings may prove at least partially beneficial. Examples indicating that potentially lower perceptions of support may be possessed by agency workers include disparities in dismissal processes (e.g. Biggs et al, 2006), the increased likelihood of reward inequality (e.g. Henson, 1996; Rogers, 2000), or the reduced levels of training provided by the employer (e.g. CoVE, 2008; Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002).

Research into permanent worker samples has highlighted several important factors that contribute to perceptions of organisational support, and when combined with the concerns raised by research in agency staff and other temporary categories, it could be argued that these workers may be prone to reduced levels of perceived organisational support. There is little doubt that agency worker contracts offer reduced protection from company dismissal (Blacklock, 2008; Hodgkiss, 2004; Lavin, 2005), and the employment practices of organisations that employ temporary labour have been called into question by a variety of studies (e.g. Biggs et al, 2006; CoVE, 2008; de Gilder, 2003; Felstead & Gallie, 2004). As well as potential issues with their employment security, these workers also appear to have little influence on workplace decisions (Aronsson et al, 2002; Parker et al, 2002). Research into permanent workers would categorise these issues as antecedents of reduced perceived organisational support (e.g. Freund, 2005; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Rhoades et al, 2001), yet transferring findings between different worker groups may prove problematic, as underlying motives and expectations may differ significantly.

The importance of motive in relation to perceived organisational support is also identified in Connelly et al's (2007) research, as they reported that their rating of 'Voluntariness' positively and significantly correlated with feelings of perceived organisational support and affective commitment towards their temporary employment agency, whilst correlations with these variables associated with the third party employer were not observed. Whereas levels of perceived organisational support have been the subject of several studies that have incorporated permanent participants, focus upon agency worker samples has been severely lacking. The dual employer relationship these workers possess undoubtedly complicates the transference of findings derived from permanent worker samples, yet several of the potential consequences that have been highlighted by these studies may still be relevant.

6.4.3. The Implications of Perceived Organisational Support for Agency Workers

As described earlier, the theory of reciprocation indicates that the most prominent consequence of perceived organisational support is that of organisational commitment, along with the variety of potential implications this variable incorporates. Rhoades et al (2001) outlined how perceived organisational support increased affective commitment by fulfilling the need for esteem, approval, and affiliation. This may in turn instil a sense of organisational membership and role status into the social identity of the individual, which may positively influence the levels of employee turnover experienced by the organisation (Rhoades et al, 2001). The cyclical assignment-based nature of agency worker employment could support the argument that agency staff are more likely to possess organisational membership with their third party employer, whilst minimal contact may also limit these perceptions towards the temporary employment agency.

As well as organisational commitment, a strong perception of organisational support has been linked to perceived effort-outcome expectancies, resulting in an increased employee commitment to organisational goals (Eisenberger et al, 1990; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Swales, 2000). Employees who perceive their organisation to be supportive have also demonstrated increased levels of attendance and greater levels of job performance (Eisenberger et al, 1990; Eisenberger et al, 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Other consequences include a felt obligation to care about the organisation's welfare, and the strengthening of employees' beliefs that the organisation will recognise and reward increased performance (Rhoades &

Eisenberger, 2002). As highlighted in earlier chapters, the average length of agency working assignments is likely to be far shorter than the tenures of permanent workers, and the reduced investment of the individual into the company is a likely outcome of this limitation.

Whilst arguments like these suggest that agency workers are likely to possess reduced levels of perceived organisational support, research has suggested this may not be the case. During their research into the commitment of US agency workers, Connelly et al (2007) reported that perceived organisational support predicted affective organisational commitment toward the third party employer, and that these perceptions were related to agency workers' affective commitment towards their temporary employment agencies. The study also indicated that the perceptions of support that agency workers attributed to the third party employer also predicted the levels of continuance commitment possessed towards the temporary employment agency, suggesting that agency worker participants were evaluating their temporary employment agencies on the basis of the quality derived from their experiences with the client company (Connelly et al, 2007). These experiences may adopt greater significance, as interactions with the agency are often brief and limited in number.

After dividing workers employed in a British local authority into permanent, fixed-term, and temporary workers, Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2002) found that the non-permanent groups reported a stronger relationship between perceived organisational support, employer inducements and organisational citizenship behaviour, suggesting that these workers responded in a strong manner to the overall benefits received from their employer. Despite these findings, the lack of specification makes it unclear if the temporary sample group contained agency workers in possession of a 'triangular' contract of employment. Research by Kuvaas and Dysvik (2007) addressed this issue by extending the social exchange mechanisms from the standard two-party relationship possessed by permanent employees and other temporary worker categories to the three-party relationship inherent in agency employment. After receiving survey responses from three hundred and seventy-five Norwegian agency workers, Kuvaas and Dysvik (2007) reported a positive relationship between social exchange perception and both organisational citizenship behaviour and task performance, before concluding that agency workers still responded to social exchanges with positive behaviours even if these behaviours did not necessarily benefit them as much as permanent employees. When summarising their research, Kuvaas and Dysvik (2007) argued

that organisations which treated their permanent and non-permanent workers consistently well would benefit by way of higher contextual and focal performance from their temporary employees.

Similar benefits of perceived organisational support have also been reported by research focussing upon permanent worker samples. Shore and Wayne (1993) indicated that perceived organisational support may be a better predictor of employee citizenship behaviours than either affective commitment or continuance commitment, whilst Poon, Salleh, and Senik (2007) reported perceived organisational support to be a significant predictor of job satisfaction.

6.4.4. Agency Workers Directive

A recent development that may have repercussions upon the levels of perceived organisational support of agency workers is that of the Agency Workers Directive. As discussed in chapter four, the Directive dictates several improvements for agency workers in relation to pay, holiday entitlement, and training, and the assumption that these entitlements may increase an individual's perceived organisational support is a logical one. However, social exchange theorists have argued that resources received from others are more highly valued if they are based on discretionary choice rather than circumstances beyond the donor's control (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). If agency workers perceived any improvements to their employment experience as legislatively enforced, feelings of support that individuals attributed towards their organisation may remain unaffected. Findings from previous research may help predict the reaction to future changes to the agency working experience, but this understanding is still limited by conjecture. The impact of the Agency Workers Directive will therefore represent a promising avenue for future research to address.

As mentioned previously, Poon et al (2007) found perceived organisational support to be a significant predictor of job satisfaction, and after investigating the relationship between job satisfaction and perceived organisational support, Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, and Lynch (1997), concluded that the two were closely related, yet distinct, constructs. Eisenberger et al (1997) suggested that an employee may believe that the organisation strongly valued their contribution and cared about their well-being, yet have low overall job satisfaction because the employer did not have the resources to prevent unfavourable treatment. Conversely, and perhaps significantly, if favourable job conditions result from legislative intervention in the form of the Agency Workers Directive, research

indicates that the effect may lead to an increase in overall job satisfaction without an accompanying increase in perceived organisational support (Eisenberger et al, 1997), as the employee may correctly perceive that the changes made were outside the discretionary control of the organisation. Due to its timing, the current research is well placed to gauge the reaction of agency workers to the decision to adopt the Directive.

6.5. Summary and Conclusions

The variables of organisational commitment and perceived organisational support are clearly important, but the existence of two 'employers' in an agency worker's employment situation immediately limits the validity of traditional assessment methods originating from research into permanent worker samples. Work into agency worker perceptions of organisational commitment has tended to focus upon feelings of commitment towards third party employers, as the majority of contact that an agency employee will have is with the client company and its workforce. This level of contact contrasts with that of the temporary employment agency. There will often be a limited period of interaction in order to meet with the individual and place them into an assignment, after which the agency may deal remotely with their workers. As with the previous chapter, the reviewed research has forwarded a series of conflicting findings. One explanation for the problems encountered by previous studies is the rigidity of quantitative methods of enquiry, which struggle to account for the dual employer arrangement. Utilising flexible qualitative methods of enquiry will allow the thesis to avoid the obstacle of accounting for two employers, as increased interaction with participants will allow the perceptions towards each to be clarified.

In line with findings into job satisfaction, one of the most important motives that research has identified is whether or not the employee resides voluntarily in a temporary position. Von Hippel et al (1997) reported a general feeling of commitment when comparing voluntary temporary agency workers with their involuntary counterparts, but Connelly et al (2007) went one step further, suggesting that individuals who pursued temporary employment voluntarily were more likely to formulate feelings of affective commitment towards their agency. After distinguishing them from their permanent counterparts, research has reported that agency staff possessed reduced feelings of organisational commitment (Biggs & Swailes, 2006), lower job quality (Mitlacher, 2008), and little loyalty towards the company (Forde & Slater, 2006). The perception that agency employment represents an undesirable

form of employment may influence results like these, yet the contrasting findings that exist throughout the literature surrounding agency worker employment indicates that understanding whether an agency worker is voluntary and involuntary may prove vital. The desire for permanent transition may also prove significant, as Von Hippel et al (1997) indicated that agency workers who hoped to gain a position with the company reported greater commitment towards their third party employer. Feather and Rauter (2004) reported a similarly positive effect, as their participants demonstrated a greater number of organisational citizenship behaviours. Findings like these support the claim made by several researchers that non-permanent workers are not necessarily emotionally detached from their temporary places of work.

The concept of perceived organisational support has received less attention than the variables of job satisfaction, job security, and organisational commitment, yet interesting findings have still been noted in relation to agency staff. Studies that have included agency workers in their samples have strongly associated perceived organisational support with affective commitment (Connelly et al, 2007), organisational citizenship behaviours (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002), and task performance (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2007). Findings like these challenge the assumption that agency workers place less priority upon the treatment they receive at the hands of their third party employers, as these studies concluded that perceptions of organisational support can provide benefits at an individual and organisational level.

Upon initial inspection, the area of temporary agency worker employment has received attention from several researchers keen to explore the psychological implications that this form of working can have for individuals. However, further analysis of the literature indicates a series of conflicting and contradictory findings. Researchers have struggled to account for the variety of motives and expectations of individuals, the dual employer relationship, and the lack of temporary worker group categorisation. The following chapter will outline the research design that will attempt to address these discrepancies, allowing the thesis to contribute to knowledge and understanding in the area.

7. Method

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapters of the thesis have served to build up a picture of the variety of issues faced by employees and employers involved in the employment of agency workers. Findings have shown that, as a result of the triangular contract and its implications, the employment of agency workers not only affects these individual workers, but can also impact upon other parties. The aim of the present thesis is to understand various viewpoints involved in the industry, from individual agency workers and their temporary employment agencies, to perspectives within third party employers. During the thesis's literature review, the rigidity inherent in the quantitative-based research designs of studies was noted as a limitation into understanding individual motives and the various perspectives present in the agency employment industry. By applying qualitative forms of enquiry which vary from the research methods used by the majority of agency worker research, the thesis will increase understanding and contribute to knowledge. The current chapter will therefore serve to outline and evaluate this research method aiming to achieve this. The data gathering process, in the form of semi-structured interviews and ethnography, will then be summarised, allowing an evaluation on the effectiveness of these techniques. The chapter will begin by outlining the assumptions underlying the current study.

7.2. Assumptions of the Study

When developing a research proposal, Crotty (2003) outlined four elements that are vital to gathering, assessing, and summarising any data. At the 'sharp end' of any research project is the method, which refers to the techniques used to collect, assess and translate the raw data into findings that can inform responses to the study's research questions. The actions of the study's method are typically justified by the methodology, which often outlines the underlying strategy and design of the method. Above the methodology resides the theoretical perspective, which describes the philosophical stance that any resultant methodological plans must incorporate. Crotty (2003) described how the theoretical perspective provides a context for the process and grounds its logic and criteria, and as a result, the theoretical perspective informs many of the assumptions that a study must make. Incorporating the theoretical perspective is the study's epistemology. The theoretical perspective informs how we see the world and make sense of the knowledge we

gather, and the epistemology is concerned with the very understanding of knowledge itself and how it originates. The overarching epistemology informing the current study is that of constructivism.

7.3. Constructivism

As the underlying epistemology of the current study, constructivism differs a great deal to the positivist and realist epistemologies that are prominent in the natural sciences. The approach of realism believes that the structure in the world is independent of human conceptual abilities, whilst an anti-realist approaches like constructivism and constructionism would consider that such claims are inconsistent, at least in part because there is no way they can be made without using concepts from a human conceptual scheme (Garnham & Oakhill, 1994).

As the names suggest, Constructionism and Constructivism share common ground on the 'construction' of meaning and sense-making within the human mind. Burr (2003) compared the similarities to those of 'family resemblance' stating that: "There is no one characteristic borne by all members of a family, but there is enough recurrent features shared amongst different family members to identify the people as basically belonging to the same family group". In both approaches, focus is given to the construction of meaning; however, a distinction is made on what influences this process of construction. Constructivism describes the individual human subject engaging with others in the world and making sense of them (Crotty, 2003), resulting in a primarily individualistic constructionist understanding. Constructionism, to the contrary, denies that this is what actually happens, at least in the first instance. Instead, each of us is introduced directly to a whole world of meaning, placing the social dimension of meaning at centre stage.

The investigation will be directed by several open-ended research questions as opposed to quantitative research, which is typically more hypothesis-driven. As a result, the study's constructivist epistemology influences the entire thesis, from the aims of the research questions, the methods of gathering data, the techniques of analysing the information, and the inferences made by any resultant findings. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is the key theoretical perspective that underlies the gathering and analysis of data.

7.4. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA represents the study's predominant theoretical perspective, and is strongly rooted in the constructivist epistemology outlined above as a result of its focus upon establishing how individuals make sense of their experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). By asking participants to recall their observations and interactions, the researcher initiates a process in which the individual interprets the phenomena they have encountered. The semi-structured interview approach I have chosen to use provides the environment that this process will take place. The participant's recollection of phenomena is integral to the practice of IPA, which leads to arguably the greatest influence upon the approach; that of phenomenology.

Phenomenology is the philosophical approach to the study of experience, and its underlying motive argues that by setting aside any prevailing understanding of these phenomena and revisiting the experience, new meaning may emerge (Crotty, 2003). The founder of phenomenology as a philosophy was Edmund Husserl, whose criticism of the tendency of psychologists to turn away from concrete experience led to the famous 'Husserlian' slogan: return to the things themselves, as experienced (Ashworth, 2008). Distinctions can therefore be drawn between other approaches, like experimental or behaviourist psychology, because emphasis is not placed upon the phenomenon itself, but how the individual applies meaning to it. This creates a strong link with the constructivist epistemology of the study, as phenomenology requires us to engage with phenomena in our world and make sense of them directly and immediately (Crotty, 2003).

For psychologists, one key value of phenomenological philosophy is that it provides a rich source of ideas for how to examine and comprehend lived experience (Smith et al, 2009). The approach therefore represents an underlying philosophy of the current thesis, as it aims to uncover a detailed examination of the participant's lived experience. The approach opposes other approaches that would aim to produce an objective statement regarding the object or event itself, as focus would remain upon the individual's personal perception or account of the object or event (Smith & Osborn, 2008). By rejecting the existence of an objective account, and instead emphasising the importance of the individual's reflection of the experience, the IPA's analysis focuses upon interpretation, leading to its second major influence; hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics can be broadly defined as the philosophy of interpretation (Crotty, 2003), and whilst originally applied to the interpretation of texts, hermeneutics has

more recently been brought to bear on unwritten sources, including human practices, human events, and human situations, in an attempt to 'read' these in ways that bring understanding (Smith et al, 2009). The importance of hermeneutics to IPA is increased still further by the existence of a double hermeneutic, as my role as researcher requires me to interpret the participant's interpretation of the phenomena. The participant's 'meaning-making' is first-order, whilst the researcher's 'sense-making' is second-order, and if the researcher is to succeed, they must employ the same mental and personal skills and capacities as the participant, with whom they share a fundamental property, i.e. that of being a human being (Smith et al, 2009).

My choice of method, and the theoretical influences it encompasses, greatly increases the role of the researcher. The majority of research into the agency working industry incorporates predominantly quantitative methods, with the aim of increasing the degree of objectivity present within the study's findings. However, for advocates of IPA, and qualitative research in general, the role of the researcher is undeniable and unavoidable, whether through the formulation of research questions, the choice of particular measures and analyses, or the interpretation of findings. Yardley (2008) argued that rather than trying to eliminate the influence of the researcher by rigidly controlling the research process, qualitative researchers generally seek to maximise the benefits of engaging directly with the participants in the study. Burr (2003, p. 152) summed up the inevitable degree of influence researchers exert by stating that: "No human being can step outside of their humanity and view the world from no position at all, which is what the idea of objectivity suggests, and this is just as true of scientists as everyone else".

As another major influence of IPA, Idiography is concerned with the particular, and operates at two levels; the commitment in the sense of detail and analysis, and the commitment to understanding how a particular experiential phenomenon has been understood from the perspective of particular people in a particular context (Smith et al, 2009). As a result, idiographic research often appears significantly different to the more popular nomothetic influence, where research is concerned with making claims at a large group or population level and establishing general laws of human behaviour. Crotty (2003) discussed the decades-old philosophical debate that has existed between idiographic and nomothetic methods of research in the discipline of psychology, and a quick glance at bodies of literature in the discipline confirms that differences of opinion between how the discipline operates still exist. After outlining some of the key principles of the approach, the chapter will continue by justifying the

choice of method and its underlying approaches in relation to the aims and objectives of the current study.

7.5. Justification of the Study's Approach

When considering the characteristics of the influences outlined above in the context of the present study, several key benefits of the approach emerge. One of the key features of the current study that was integral to the adoption of the approach was the variety of samples encompassed in the study's design. Whilst the phenomenon of agency working remained central to the thesis during the data gathering phase, the participants of the sample represented different points of view, allowing the resulting analysis to incorporate several perspectives. Quantitative survey-based methods may attempt to draw a series of comparisons between the different samples in order to understand the central phenomena under investigation, but incorporating phenomenology shifted the emphasis of resulting analyses onto the participant's interpretation of the phenomena. This also tied in with the idiographic nature of the study. The influence of idiography meant that the phenomenon of agency working was viewed from the perspective of specific participants in specific contexts. This contrasts with the nomothetic view that results should be generalisable to a larger sample, and this was considered potentially problematic when assessing the category of agency workers.

Hermeneutics represented another key approach in the research, and played a significant role in the analytical process. Studies which encompass more empirical and objective epistemological assumptions would view the researcher as a separate and distinct entity who oversees the collection and analysis of data, but the present thesis acknowledged and explored the researcher's role throughout the process. One key aspect informing this decision was my previous experience as an agency worker prior to the study, which undoubtedly instilled several assumptions towards the industry before the research commenced. The second methodological consideration that informed the decision to employ a hermeneutic approach was the decision to include an ethnographic data source. During the time spent carrying out the study, I planned to undertake a series of agency working assignments, recording thoughts, perceptions, and opinions on the resulting experiences. This meant the study's findings incorporated ethnographic analysis from work diary excerpts alongside a main body of data contained in the semi-structured interviews, and this combination made my role in the study difficult to ignore.

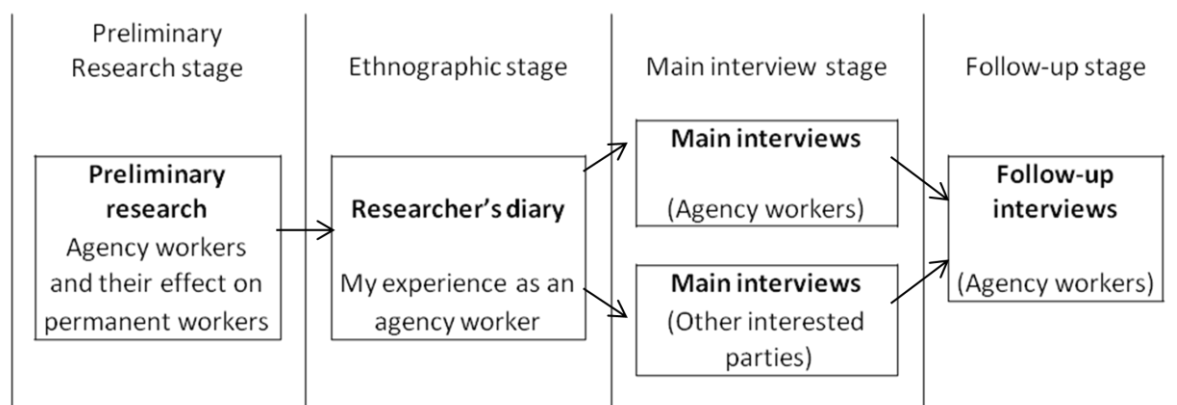
Another important factor stemming from the epistemological assumptions of the thesis was the degree of freedom that existed in the methods compatible with the approach. In order for interpretive phenomenological analysis to take place, data needed to be recorded in a qualitative format, ensuring that semi-structured interviews formed the basis of the study's method. My decision to utilise this approach came after analysing the characteristics of interpretive phenomenological analysis and the resultant methods this approach could encompass: namely semi-structured interviews and ethnographic analysis.

Other research has noted the advantages of a qualitative approach in their research into agency employment. Torcka and Schyns' (2007) research into sources of job satisfaction among low and medium skilled metal workers in two Dutch companies utilised qualitative methods, namely semi-structured interviews and participant observation. When concluding their research, Torcka and Schyns (2007) argued that the qualitative methods they utilised allowed them to identify alternative sources of agency worker satisfaction and job satisfaction, including perceived alternatives on the external labour market, work experience in sectors where non-permanent employment relationships are more common, up-to-date self presentation competencies necessary for acquiring employment (e.g. experiences with job interviews), and experiences with the state employment office. In effect, the qualitative methods incorporated in the study allowed the temporary agency workers to describe what they liked about their occupation with a greater level of detail and accuracy than other, more quantitative methods of job satisfaction measurement. I felt that qualitative methods would aid my assessment of agency worker groups, as Rogers (2000) suggested when stating that some of the problems that general temporary workers experience are less likely to lend themselves to easy quantification.

7.6. Research Method

The research design of the current study consisted of several key stages, beginning with a preliminary study into the psychological effects of agency working on the individual agency workers and the permanent employees they work alongside. This helped to inform the main research questions of the current study, as well as the choice of methods I have employed to research the area. The stages incorporated into the current thesis are outlined in figure 7.1 below, and will be explored in greater detail later in the chapter.

Figure 7.1. Model of the Research Design



7.6.1. Preliminary Research

Initial preliminary research was completed in the form of an MSc dissertation that considered the psychological effects of agency working, as well as the potential influence of a company's utilisation of agency workers upon its permanent workforce. The study placed ninety-six participants into three categories: agency workers, permanent workers that worked with agency workers, and permanent workers that did not work with agency workers. The study adopted a quantitative research method, which took the form of a forty-five item questionnaire that included variables for 'job satisfaction', 'skill variety', 'organisational commitment', 'job security', and 'autonomy'. Agency workers and permanent workers who worked with them recorded lower levels of job security when compared with the responses of the third sample group, although reports of organisational commitment did not differ significantly between the three participant sample groups. A more in-depth review of the preliminary research can be seen in appendix A. The preliminary research had a positive influence upon the current research, as it identified some of the psychological effects that agency working can have upon the individual, and the potential impact that they may have upon the permanent workforce. The limitations of the preliminary research were also influential in creating the research design of the thesis. The rigidity and potential confusion of the quantitative questionnaire-based approach to data collection was noted to reduce the flexibility of individual responses and severely hamper the study's ability to consider some of the other perspectives involved in the agency employment industry. These issues have been addressed in the current thesis with the adoption of a qualitative research design that incorporates semi-structured interviews and ethnographic analysis.

7.6.2. Ethnography

Whilst a considerable amount of data would be collected through the utilisation of semi-structured interviews, first-hand experience was also identified as a valuable insight into the agency employment industry. In order to provide this second major source of data, I decided to seek employment as an agency worker, incorporating resulting experiences into the study. This was achieved through ethnography, a method with strong associations to the epistemological assumptions and theoretical approaches of the study. Over the course of the thesis, I experienced employment in several assignments that varied considerably in their content, shift patterns, location, and working practices. During these assignments, I kept in-depth written notes in diary form, before transferring them to a word processor in order to keep them secure and increase the ease of the coding process. By keeping a diary of perceptions, opinions, and incidents encountered, I felt I was able to achieve a greater insight into the agency employment industry. A series of extracts from the research diary are in appendix B.

7.6.3. Main Interviews

7.6.3.1. Sample

Initial categorisation of participants placed individuals into two groups. The first of these groups consisted of agency workers and totalled twelve, and the second group represented other interested parties and encompassed thirteen participants from temporary employment agencies and third party employers. Table 7.1. below provides some basic data upon the participants who took part in the study, including their names, ages, locations, positions, and brief descriptors of roles they discuss in greater detail throughout the analysis chapters of the thesis.

In order to obtain participants for both major groups, I relied upon a mixture of two main sampling techniques, which Clark-Carter (2004) categorised as 'purposive' and 'snowball' sampling. Purposive sampling occurs when the researcher wishes to study a clearly defined sample, and was utilised during my efforts to secure participants who represented several different perspectives within the agency employment industry, including agency workers, recruitment consultants, and representatives of the third party employers. Snowball sampling was used far less frequently, and occurred when initial contacts identified further participants who would be interested in taking part in my research. By interviewing individuals possessing varying perspectives of the agency employment industry, I felt I gained

a more rounded view on the implications of agency worker utilisation in the present-day UK labour market.

Table 7.1. The Participants of the Study

Name	Age	Location	Position	Brief Role Description
Barry	Late 20's	W. Midlands	Agency	Basic administrator for major insurance company
Baz	Mid 20's	S. West	Agency	Administrator for sales team at large insurance firm
Ben	Mid 20's	E. Anglia	Permanent	Silver service team leader
Cathy	Mid 40's	N. London	Permanent	Recruitment manager for major industrial company
Cynthia	Early 40's	N. London	Permanent	Branch manager for major delivery company
Dan C	Early 20's	W. Midlands	Permanent	Team leader at major insurance company
Dan G	Late 20's	S. West	Agency	Basic administrator for major accountancy firm
Dan N	Early 30's	E. Anglia	Agency	Office support for international education organisation
Ivan	Early 40's	N. London	Agency	Warehouse worker for major delivery company
James H	Mid 20's	W. Midlands	Agency	Patient support worker for healthcare company
Jamie G	Late 20's	E. Anglia	Agency	Silver service waiter
Jason	Mid 30's	E. Anglia	TEA	Recruitment consultant
Jenny	Late 20's	E. Anglia	TEA	Recruitment consultant
Julie	Late 30's	S. West	TEA	Recruitment consultant
Kris	Mid 20's	W. Midlands	Permanent	Silver service waiter
Mike	Late 20's	S. West	Agency	Manual labourer for theatre and furniture companies
Nick M	Mid 20's	S. West	Permanent	Middle manager for large sporting venue
Nick P	Mid 40's	N. London	TEA	Temporary employment agency manager
Polly	Mid 20's	E. Anglia	TEA	Recruitment consultant
Rejani	Late 20's	E. Anglia	Agency	Exam marker for local education authority
Robert	Early 40's	E. Anglia	Agency	Exam marker for local education authority
Sam	Late 20's	N. London	Permanent	Airport baggage handler
Simon	Early 40's	E. Anglia	TEA	Recruitment consultant
Tom	Late 20's	E. Anglia	Agency	Team leader at local education authority
Yomi	Early 30's	N. London	Agency	Warehouse worker for major delivery company

7.6.3.2. Methods of Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were utilised to collect data from the study's sample of participants. Question scripts were constructed to ensure a greater degree of reliability and transferability in the analysis phase between participants and sample groups. Questions were included, excluded, or adapted dependent upon which sample group the participant of the interview belonged to. In order to ensure that interviews were semi-structured, I told participants at the start of the discussion that they should feel comfortable to expand upon themes and introduce topics that they felt were relevant. The semi-structured nature of the interviews also allowed me the

freedom to pursue specific lines of questioning when required, as opposed to sticking rigidly to the question script. In order to aid documentation of the data, interviews were recorded, with the consent of the participant, on a digital Dictaphone. By recording the discussions with participants, I was able to transcribe each interview with a far greater degree of accuracy compared to a note-taking method.

7.6.3.3. Composition of the Question Script

The composition of the question script was informed by survey-based questions from five previous psychological studies (i.e. Biggs & Swailes, 2006; Cook & Wall, 1980; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986; Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Oldham, Kulik, Stepina, & Ambrose, 1986). Two key alterations were needed for the majority of survey items before they were applied to the current study. Firstly, the items in their original survey form existed as statements with an accompanying scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The change in wording meant that these items were altered from statements to open-ended questions e.g. 'The job gives me considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do the work' was changed to 'To what extent do you feel you should be entitled to more independence and freedom in how you do your work?'. This allowed any resulting responses to be free from the limitation of circling a pre-defined statement that typically characterises quantitative closed-question survey formats.

The second and more complex alteration resulted from the nature of the employment arrangements experienced by the samples of participants in the study. For agency workers, the existence of two employers (i.e. the agency and client organisation) meant relatively simple questions needed further clarification, with an example being 'I feel myself to be part of the organisation'. When applied to a participant residing in a standard employment relationship this item is clear, yet when asked to an agency worker, further clarification between the agency and client organisation is required. By asking such a question in an interview setting, I was able to clarify and specify each potential point of misunderstanding. This contrasts with the more common survey-based approach to data gathering, as I would likely be absent during this process. The inclusion of permanent worker and organisation-based perspectives in the sample also impacted upon the choice of questions, yet the flexibility of the interview setting, combined with the ability to shape and remove questions, allowed me to ask suitable and relevant questions throughout the interviewing process. Whilst reducing the study's ability to draw comparisons

between the sample groups, I felt that any increased validity and specificity encompassed in the questions minimised the risks of obtaining ambiguous and potentially confused responses from interviewees.

Research into the temporary working arrangements of agency workers has applied a range of psychological variables, often in a survey-based structure. The earlier chapters of the thesis have highlighted some interesting variables in previous research, and the current study has incorporated several of the items used in these studies, albeit in a highly doctored form. Job satisfaction is often a recurring theme, and the present study incorporated interview questions associated with this variable, along with the variable designed to assess an individual's perceived level of autonomy, which were both originally created by Hackman and Oldham (1975) in their job diagnostic survey. For organisational commitment, items from the British Organisational Commitment Scale by Cook and Wall (1980) formed the basis of several interview questions, whilst several items were incorporated from research into perceived organisational support by Eisenberger et al (1986). To explore perceptions of job security in the sample, the study based several interview questions on items present in the 'job security perceptions' scale developed by Oldham et al (1986) for their study, and the 'worker relations' scales by Biggs and Swailes (2006) influenced the questioning that examined the connections between co-workers, supervisors, and the organisation. By informing the qualitative methods of enquiry with quantitative elements from previous research, I hoped to bridge the gap between these varying approaches.

In order to explore the perspectives of representatives from the sample groups of agency workers, temporary employment agencies, third party employers, and permanent workers, I compiled four sets of question script. In order to provide some statistical data about the interviewees, several questions were asked to ascertain basic facts about the individual's experiences, including the number and lengths of assignment, the number of agencies signed with, or the motives underlying the decision to seek agency employment. The subject of the impending Agency Workers Directive was also considered, and several questions were created to explore the reaction and perception of the Directive's adoption into UK employment practice. The interview ended with a set of general questions that were not easily categorised, allowing me to explore any aspects of the participant's experience missed by my previous questions. A copy of the interview question scripts can be seen in appendix C.

7.6.3.4. Procedure

As a result of the variety of participants who the study needed to access, several forms of initial communication were employed. I began by compiling a list of temporary employment agencies in and around the local area by using the internet. I then telephoned each listed agency to explain my project and describe how they could help. Due to their presence on the high street and the telephone and Internet access, I often regarded temporary employment agencies as the gatekeepers for accessing agency workers, organisations, and permanent workers residing within those organisations. As a result, the majority of attempts to make contact with potential sample participants occurred via telephone and email contact with these agencies. I sought initial meetings with senior members of agencies, allowing me to explain the aims of the current study, and the degree of anonymity that would be provided to any individuals who agreed to take part. Such meetings were often positive, and allowed the researcher to obtain additional sample participants for each of the major groups. In some cases, individuals requested to see the topics and themes that would be covered by the interview, and in these instances, a copy of the question script was provided, allowing the individuals to see what would be covered by the specific questions.

I also gathered participants through my employment as an agency worker, which placed me in direct contact with fellow agency workers, their permanent counterparts, and management staff from the third party employer. After approaching these individuals and discussing my research, many offered to help by consenting to be interviewed. Once an individual agreed to the interview, dates and times were discussed, with the intention of causing as little disruption to the participant's day as possible.

Prior to beginning the interview, I took time to go over the general themes of the script with the interviewee. In order to gain informed consent from the participant, ethical guidelines were also discussed in relation to the recording of the interview, the anonymity of the transcript, the storage of the data, and how any resultant findings would be outlined in the thesis. This initial discussion led to fully informed verbal consent being given by the participants. Section 7.6.5. below will provide a greater focus upon the ethical considerations affecting the study. The semi-structured nature of the interview was also stressed to the participant, with the aim of giving the interviewee the confidence to pursue particular trains of thought, or discuss certain experiences that may not strictly relate to the question that had been

asked. Once this had been covered, I activated the Dictaphone and began asking the questions from the script.

7.6.3.5. Transcription

After each interview had taken place, I carried out a transcription of the recorded data. This enabled the omission of any non-essential information given by the interviewee relating to people, places, and companies, allowing transcripts to be completely anonymous. This allowed me to fulfil the obligation of anonymity made to the participant prior to the interview. The length of the interviews, and therefore the transcripts, varied considerably. The average interview length was around forty-five minutes, which would in turn generate a transcript containing approximately eight or nine thousand words of data to analyse. Once the transcription process was completed, the raw data was uploaded onto a qualitative data analysis programme called Nvivo 8 in order to begin the coding process.

7.6.3.6. Coding

Once the transcribed raw data had been uploaded onto Nvivo, the process of compiling codes began. I used Question scripts to build an initial list of codes covered during the interviews, as these provided the greatest indication of the themes present within the interviewees' answers. The question scripts led to the identification of seventy-four codes within the data. These codes were divided into eleven broad themes, which were: Statistics, Motives for Agency Workers, Job Satisfaction, Organisational Commitment, Job Security, Perceived Organisational Support, the Agency Workers Directive, Agency Worker Interaction with Permanent Workers, Agency Worker Interaction with TPE, Agency Worker Interaction with TEA, and TEA Interaction with the TPE. Once the initial codes had been established, I began the process of thematically coding the raw data. This led to the creation of an additional fourteen codes, resulting in a total of eighty-eight codes. A list of the eleven themes and the eighty-eight codes they encompass can be seen in appendix D. The creation of a framework of thematic coding allowed the researcher to label, distribute, and analyse the large quantity of data effectively. An example of a coded interview transcript can be seen in appendix E. Once this stage of the analysis was complete, the themes, experiences, and phenomena identified during the thematic coding process were then assessed and interpreted using interpretative phenomenological analysis.

7.6.4. Follow-up Interviews

One of the key characteristics highlighted by the previous chapters is the short-term nature of agency employment. Unlike many permanent employment roles, agency working arrangements are rarely measured in years as they often occur over days, weeks, or months. To increase the study's ability to assess the individual experiences of agency employment, I decided to carry out follow-up enquiries into the experiences of the agency workers in the study's sample after completion of the initial interview. Despite not being considered a 'stand alone' source of data, the 'follow-ups' allowed me to enquire about many of the short-term future developments discussed during the interview. This created a longitudinal dimension to the primarily cross-sectional data collected from the original interviews.

7.6.5. Ethical Considerations

In the initial discussions prior to each interview, participants consented to the inclusion of their first names and their general geographical locations. Participants also agreed to my use of a digital Dictaphone during their interviews, as the importance of recording, transcribing, and coding responses was discussed with them in detail before each interview began. An estimated time period for the completion of the process, which was based upon the question prompts and my past experience, was also forwarded. As well as discussing some of the topics of the forthcoming interview with individuals, I also provided examples of specific questions that would be put to them during the process. This allowed individuals to better understand the focus of the interview before consenting to take part. These initial discussions also allowed me to provide the participant with a brief summary of myself, including why I chose to approach the topic of agency workers, the stage my research was at the time, and the aims that I wanted my thesis to address.

The openness of the pre-interview discussions ensured that 'covert' methods were not required at any stage, as the research's objectives, methods, and focus were always transparent. All participants were fully consenting adults, the youngest of whom was in their early twenties. All were engaged in full-time employment. Face-to-face interaction was integral to informing individuals before the process began, although its benefits also applied throughout the interview. Participants were able to seek clarification at any point if they felt unsure, as well as skip questions that they did not want to answer. The transparency of the research process enabled informed voluntary consent to be gained, in line with the ethical guidelines established by the British Psychological Society and the University of Gloucestershire.

Each of the agency worker participants consented to further contact, in the form of follow-up interviews, which allowed me to further discuss the themes, topics, and opinions that emerged once transcription and coding had taken place. This provided an opportunity for participants to re-evaluate the statements they had forwarded earlier in the data gathering process, and to consider the conclusions I had derived from my analysis. Significant concluding statements made by participants during their follow-up interviews were also featured throughout the thesis.

7.7. Strengths of the Method

7.7.1. Flexibility

The increased level of flexibility permitted by the choice of method was a key incentive, examples of which occurred frequently during the interviewing stage of the research. One of the key factors in the choice of method was my ability to bring the strengths of the chosen method to bear. With predominantly quantitative methods like structured questionnaires, a participant's answers can be compared to a potentially large pool of previous responses which can serve as a control group that, in some cases, may extend over several decades. However, in agency worker research, this strength can become a weakness, as the rigidity of the variables required to ascertain high scores of reliability and validity could lead to misinterpretation, confusion, and a lack of clarity when applied to agency workers residing in a significantly different employment setting from more traditional and widespread permanent settings.

The relatively greater flexibility present in the questions and their responses also extended to the categorisation of the participant groups. If an individual revealed mid-interview that they had previously belonged to another participant group (e.g. agency or permanent worker), the method allowed me to explore this slight shift in perspective with a different line of questioning. As a result, several individuals possessed the ability to draw comparisons between alternative employment experiences, providing greater insights for me to draw upon. The incorporation into the sample of individuals possessing the benefit of hindsight became an unexpected, yet significant strength. The alternative employment experiences created benchmarks that allowed participants to draw comparisons between these differing experiences; by adopting a flexible approach in these instances, I was able to retrieve any potentially valuable information that quantitative methods may have been unable to access.

Another key example of flexibility stemming from the semi-structured interview resulted from the interviewee's freedom to answer each question. The motives underlying an individual's decision to become an agency worker demonstrate the advantages of not needing to group participant responses into specific categories. The number and variety of responses on this topic alone can often translate into difficulties for survey-based studies attempting to understand these complex motives. In order to provide a detailed empirical analysis, Tan and Tan's (2002) research into agency worker motives in Singapore adopted a survey incorporating twenty 'reasons', each with a standard five-point scale of response. When compared with the current study, the researcher perceived the relatively simplistic interview-based methods of enquiry more favourably. Whilst the method permitted the participant to outline complex and highly specific reasons, it also allowed considerably simplistic responses, and unlike with quantitative studies like Tan and Tan's (2002), participants also possessed the flexibility to describe the context from which the decision to pursue agency employment emerged. This flexibility was apparent in a variety of topics addressed during the interview. The interview also avoided the 'creation' of opinions that surveys containing leading questions may inadvertently incorporate. Survey respondents may feel pressurized to provide an answer for every item in a questionnaire, even if it is for a perception they have never experienced. The reliance upon open-ended questions during the interview reduced this effect, as participants were able to simply express any absence of opinion to me.

7.7.2. Richness of Data

Another key strength of the chosen method was the sheer richness of data that it could access and record. The interview process incorporated a series of open-ended questions, which provided the participant with an opportunity to discuss a variety of experiences and perceptions associated with the agency employment industry. My choice of method developed from the idiographic nature of the epistemology, as I felt that focussing upon the individual would increase the level of data available for analysis. This method strongly contrasts with a nomothetic approach in which data is collected transformed, and analysed in a manner which prevents the retrieval or analysis of the individuals who originally provided the data (Smith et al, 2009). I felt that a more nomothetic approach would reduce participant responses into a series of numbers and pre-defined statements, causing the quality of individual-level data to ultimately suffer. This also allowed a greater insight into the quality of responses given by each individual. When questions are answered in

a structured and closed-response format, the strength of feeling present in the varying answers an individual provides can be difficult to determine. However, when discussing a deeply rooted and potentially major concern, the interviewee possessed the ability to expand upon their answer to a far greater extent.

By adopting a qualitative approach to the collection of data, I also felt that varying degrees of focus could be given to the interview responses provided by individuals. Several questions proposed hypothetical situations in order to explore the participant's resulting perceptions of that experience. With survey-based methods, the aim is to measure the experiences and perceptions of the individuals by using a predefined scale, ensuring that any answers provided must be treated equally. This differs with interviews, as the researcher is able to record the recounted experiences and perceptions of the participants as verbatim (Hugh-Jones, 2010). One example of an item containing a hypothetical situation within the questionnaire is as follows: "If you found your organisation was struggling financially, would you look for alternative employment?" For many of the participants, this is a situation that has never knowingly been experienced, but for others, company finance may have been, or continues to be, a very real problem. When responding to a purely hypothetical question, the participant's answer may still offer a great deal of insight into their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of their employment role. However, I regularly found participants who possessed genuine experience of the situations suggested throughout the question-script, and due to the choice of method, I had the option of treating any resulting answers as potentially more valid and insightful.

7.7.3. Interview Follow-ups

Throughout the data gathering process, the short-term nature of the agency workers' assignment-based employment circumstances was a recurring theme. The participants would often refer to hopes for employment developments occurring in the near future, including preferential assignments or permanent transitions. My original decision to rely on the initial interviews would mean that any data gathered would be entirely cross-sectional in nature, preventing me from gathering information on the short-term future of the agency worker. In order to understand the short-term career developments referred to in the original interview, I decided to include brief follow-up correspondences with the agency workers of the study. To do this, I approached participants from the agency worker sample several months after the initial interview, often via telephone or email, with a list of follow-up questions referring to previously-made comments about short-term future aspirations. Whilst

not comparable in depth and quantity to the datasets resulting from the initial interviews, I felt that the inclusion of interview follow-ups created a longitudinal dimension to the original interviews. The subject of the data often related to the short-term, cyclical experiences of agency workers, and the decision to use follow-up data allowed me to seek conclusions to many of the accounts introduced by participants during the initial interviews.

7.7.4. Increased Level of Control

The potential level of control I was able to exert during the interview was undoubtedly relatively high compared with more quantitative approaches to data collection. The utilisation of a question script helped structure the interview, and my presence allowed further questioning to be shaped in light of the information received from initial questions. Whilst the incorporation of a list of questions provided considerable insight into a wide variety of potential topics, the semi-structured nature of the interview allowed a great deal of freedom in the pursuit of information. This meant that lines of enquiry which failed to elicit any interesting responses from the participant were soon abandoned in favour of those that evoked stronger feelings and experiences within the interviewee were pursued. The increased freedom of the interview setting also translated into key benefits for the participant, most notably in the ability to seek clarification on my questions. By seeking clarification, the participant also increased their level of control over the interview, and this led to a greater degree of understanding of the questions and therefore greater validity in their answers. The participants were also given opportunities to raise points that were not addressed by the questioning, allowing any key topics that I missed to be explored in the interview.

7.7.5. Experiences of the Researcher

The incorporation of ethnographic analysis provided a format for me to report the wide range of experiences encountered during my time spent employed as an agency worker. Whilst this predominantly served as a means for reporting my perceptions, thoughts, and opinions, it also allowed for the inclusion of similar information from others' viewpoints that the interview format was unable to encompass. Interviews can create a relatively formal setting in which participant reactions to their jobs may become slightly tempered and less reactionary, but I found that recording co-worker encounters from my perspective provided the resulting data with a sense of immediacy with regard to the experiences of the workforce which other more reflective methods of data collection would struggle to

achieve. Despite the individualistic and introspective nature strongly associated with the method of ethnography, the keeping of notes relating to the reactions of others to developments within the job became as important to me as recording their own reaction to the same events.

Despite allowing participants to voice their experiences of agency worker employment in an in-depth manner, barriers were often in place which prevented the effective application of this method. One such barrier was language, and the presence of migrant workers who spoke basic English prevented me from asking the relatively complex questions present in my question script. After describing the research and the potential aid which the individuals could provide, I regularly held brief and informal conversations at breaks or natural 'lulls' in the workload, and noted the key points of the conversations in my work diary. This allowed me to report a variety of perspectives which would have been excluded if the study relied upon interview methods alone. By incorporating ethnographic findings alongside those of the semi-structured interviews, I was able to triangulate the study's findings with those of previous studies explored earlier in the thesis.

7.8. Limitations and Criticisms of the Method

7.8.1. Difficulties in Group Comparison and Generalisability

The decision to use semi-structured interviews led to several limitations that would not necessarily exist in alternative methods. Questions had to be adapted to apply to each sample group, reducing the study's ability to compare a proportion of the responses between these groups. This point is a common criticism often levelled at qualitative research in general, as quantitative research questions are often identical and highly controlled. Dependent variables in quantitative studies are typically categorised on a simplistic and recurring scale of measurement, allowing instant comparisons between independent variables, in this case represented by worker groups.

This is important to quantitative researchers when attempting to ascertain the levels of validity and reliability for variables, although qualitative research enjoys a greater degree of freedom from such rigid parameters. If these parameters were strictly adhered to by the current research, confusion may well follow, as an individual's sample group could influence how they interpret questions. One such example could be the potentially different connotations participants may place on the term 'employer', as the triangular form of employment experienced by agency workers

must be considered. One further point is the precedent set by previous studies. The vast majority of quantitative variables originate in former research, and this is even truer of widespread and popular variables like job satisfaction and organisational commitment manifested in the current study. Whilst previous studies in agency employment have often focused on agency workers, and occasionally permanent staff working alongside them, the current thesis incorporated perspectives from employment agencies and third party employers, allowing a more encompassing representation of the agency employment industry.

7.8.2. Reduced Anonymity

Individuals may also have been less inclined to discuss negative aspects of the job that may jeopardise their employment during an interview, instead preferring the anonymity of a questionnaire to voice issues and concerns. The problem of employee concern for discussing negative aspects became apparent very early on in the planning stages of the research. From the point of initial contact, the high level of anonymity that I was able to promise was discussed. Prior to the beginning of any interview, the assurance was reiterated in detail with the participant. As well as ensuring all interviews occurred in private, I discussed precisely what would happen to the discussion, through the recording, transcription, analysis, and ultimate reporting of the interview. The degree of transparency I offered undoubtedly encouraged frankness in the interviews, as participants appeared at ease with discussing a variety of issues associated with their employment situation, be it their own, or that of others. Despite outlining the high degree of anonymity present in the recording, analysis, and reporting of the participant's answers prior to the interview, the perceptions of anonymity possessed by the participant may still be lower compared to those associated with anonymous surveys.

7.8.3. Increased Time Consumption

The interview process itself was a relatively time consuming one for me and the participants, so obtaining initial interest and participation from individuals was often more difficult as a result. In my role as the researcher, this greater commitment in time extended past the interview stage, as the average time spent gathering, transcribing, and analysing data for each participant was typically greater compared with other methods. When compared with other methods of data gathering, the process also proved rather costly as I typically had to travel more frequently to form a sample group, and employers had to give up more time to meet my demands. Despite the greater time commitment demanded for me and the participants, I

concluded that the benefits discussed earlier in the chapter offset these problems, which were ultimately unavoidable. The decision was also taken in light of previous research discussed in earlier chapters, as I felt the thesis would ultimately make a greater contribution to the body of literature if a more qualitative approach were applied to the area.

7.9. Reflexivity

If based in chronological order, the first key point to be highlighted in reflexive analysis is my experience as an agency worker a couple of years before beginning the thesis. I typically sought employment over the summer months between each university year, purely in order to make money before starting the first semester of university. It was in this capacity that I experienced employment for one summer as an agency worker, and employment over two summers on a standard short-term permanent contract. Both these jobs were comparable in a variety of ways, as they consisted of low-skilled industrial factory labour in similar locations.

My time spent in the agency role was highly repetitive, mundane, and frustrating. Interaction with co-workers during work was near impossible, as I was typically placed in isolation and asked to do a very limited range of tasks over the course of an eight-hour shift. The permanent workers made little effort to communicate during break-times, and I felt I and my fellow agency workers were regarded as a distinct subgroup that was only there to repeatedly carry out the most basic of tasks. I soon left the job after completing the minimum time stated by the agency at the beginning of the assignment, and asked them to find me another assignment at a different company. The agency soon got in contact with me, but it was for the same assignment that I had left previously after insisting I did not want to return. After my refusal, the agency never contacted me again.

This experience undoubtedly tainted my view of agency employment. It is therefore a key factor in my personal reflexivity, and may have influenced my decision to explore the area through psychological analysis. However, the potential aid it could offer individuals in my position leads to the second key point of reflexive analysis. In my status as a student, I found myself in a position shared by many other young individuals looking to fill their summers with paid employment. The role as a student impacts greatly upon the hierarchy of needs that individuals demand from their employment. I was under no illusion that any of the assignments offered to me would greatly further my long-term career aspirations, or provide me with any potentially useful skills, with the possible exception of exposing me to a structured

work-day. In contrast, the goals of students looking to become agency workers in between their years of university typically revolve around short-term goals, most notably the securing of finances to help see them through their impending academic experiences. As a result, I felt that several of the negative experiences encountered by students during agency employment would likely be tempered by the low expectancies that may be held.

My status as a student also had a considerable impact upon the aims of the thesis, most notably the first research question. I understood the potential vulnerability that an individual's status as a student may entail, as I desperately needed funds to see me through the oncoming university semester. It was also the case that any employment experiences, good or bad, were going to be short-term, lasting a maximum of several months. This was a situation in which many students would find themselves over the summer months, and undoubtedly coincides with the characteristics of agency employment. By broadening the question to include other potentially vulnerable groups like migrant workers and individuals recently experiencing redundancy, I felt the research would be ideally placed to evaluate the potential benefits that agency employment could provide, as well as the possible difficulties that agency workers from these groups might experience.

Ensuring that a level of transparency exists throughout the study is a key aim for a qualitative researcher, and using a reflective diary to keep notes throughout the process is an advisable technique for achieving this (Shaw, 2010). In the current study, the presence of a research diary had a dual role resulting from my decision to incorporate an ethnographic dataset to analyse, alongside the findings obtained from the interviews. Taking notes in this format became a regular feature of the research phase, and whilst the incorporation of my experiences as an agency worker received the greatest level of attention, note-taking also occurred throughout interviews and the multiple stages of analysis. One further method for regularly tracking my research's progress was the decision to create a new folder of documents on the computer every month. This allowed me to take a snapshot of my development, creating a trail of many versions of my writing with a month's gap between each.

As a researcher, my greatest influence upon the data gathering process undoubtedly occurred whilst assembling the question script. The choice of method aimed to provide the participants with a considerable degree of flexibility and freedom when answering the questions of the researcher, whilst ensuring I had a

strong degree of control over the topics and themes covered during the interview. The choice of method significantly impacts upon the level of control available to the researcher and the degree of freedom experienced by the participant when answering, and I felt that semi-structured interviews achieved the right balance. When evaluating other methods in relation to the current study, I believe my choice of method was the correct one when compared with alternative data-gathering techniques. I felt the highly structured survey-based methods often favoured by studies in the agency worker literature appeared too restrictive in the degree of autonomy given to participants when responding, whilst unstructured techniques like discourse analysis would have forfeited too much direction and validity in the themes under discussion. Whilst my influence over findings was undoubtedly reduced by my choice of method when compared with studies approaching participants with a structured survey, the degree of influence resulting from my decision to guide interviews with a pre-defined question script must be acknowledged.

7.10. Summary

The chapter began by outlining the epistemological approach of Constructivism and the theoretical perspectives of Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, and Idiography, and these influences can be observed throughout the resulting research design of the study. The design incorporated the data collection methods of semi-structured interviews and follow-ups, as well as epistemological analysis. The strengths and weaknesses of these techniques were then assessed with the benefit of hindsight, allowing a well-rounded and efficient appraisal to occur.

As with any choice of methods, limitations and criticisms undoubtedly exist, yet I believed that the strengths outlined in the chapter offset these potential weaknesses, and strongly argued the case for adopting methods that vary from the considerable majority of research into the area of agency employment. The chapter is concluded with the exploration of my role in the research, and how my actions and experiences may have influenced any of the resulting findings.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the analysis of data led to the identification of eleven themes, encapsulating a total of eighty-eight codes. These themes have in turn informed four analysis chapters, the first of which will focus upon the theme of motivation. During the interviews, I quickly identified the presence of motive as a major influence in temporary agency employment that must be explored. Whilst motives typically led individuals to seek the services of temporary employment

agencies, the effect of these motives regularly continued throughout any resultant employment experiences. The following chapter will now consider the effect of motives in greater detail.

8. Motives

8.1. Introduction

As the earlier chapters of the thesis demonstrated, a great deal of focus is given to the psychological consequences of agency working, yet the findings of the current study suggest that the motives which lead individuals and organisations to seek the services of temporary employment agencies can play a significant role in the resulting perceptions. Whilst variables like job satisfaction and organisational commitment are measured in order to ascertain the impact of agency worker assignments upon individuals, motives often pre-date these assignments entirely, as they are typically central to the individual's decision to pursue agency work in the first place. Although the influence of workers' motives may also play a significant role in the experiences of workers in permanent employment, it could be argued that the agency employment industry differs through the sheer number and variety of motives that agency workers may possess.

Ethnographic analysis is well placed to consider the importance of motive in the perceptions held towards temporary agency employment. Including a section on reflexivity in the previous chapter not only allowed me to consider the impact of motive on my following experiences, but also identified how these underlying opinions may have influenced me in my role as researcher. Its inclusion in the form of reflexivity means that ethnographic introspection will be omitted from the current chapter, which will instead focus upon the interview data gathered from the study's participants. Ethnographic analysis will be used alongside participant interview data in the following three analysis chapters.

As discussed earlier, agency working often requires little, if any, commitment from either the individual or the organisation, and is often recognised for the provision of temporary, short-to-medium term employment opportunities. Such roles often characterise the industry, and represent a stark contrast with the more traditional, career-focussed, and long-term job roles at the other end of the employment spectrum. Consequently, the nature and degree of variety which the agency employment industry can offer prospective agency workers helps to explain the comparatively greater assortment of individual motives. The current chapter will begin by exploring these motives, and their impact upon the employment perceptions of agency workers at an individual level. The chapter will then conclude by exploring the motives of agency worker utilisation from an organisational

perspective, including that of temporary employment agencies themselves, and representatives of the client companies which utilise their services.

Even with a relatively small sample, which often characterises qualitative studies, the motives for agency workers varied considerably. The theme of motives encompassed eight codes. These form the structure of the current chapter, and include: 'agency does the work', 'flexibility', 'an employment stopgap/just for the money', 'the perils of not saying "yes"', 'redundancy', 'preference for permanent employment', 'experience/future employment prospects', and 'temp-to-perm transition'. Two key motives associated with organisations' decisions to utilise agency workers were also identified and coded: 'lack of financial and contractual responsibility', and 'fast increase in numbers'.

8.2. The Motives of Agency Workers

8.2.1. Agency does the Work

One clear benefit that often motivates individuals to seek out the services of an employment agency is that recruitment consultants can shoulder part of the burden in the search for work. The search for employment can be a daunting prospect for all concerned, yet certain individuals may be even more susceptible to the difficulties of this situation. At-risk groups may include individuals who have recently left full-time education and possess little experience of employment, workers who have been made redundant after many years of service, and migrant workers new to the UK labour market. The ability to utilise the services of consultants who possess specialist knowledge on placing workers into assignments can be a key benefit, and this sharing of responsibility was cited as a strong motivator by agency workers like Baz who participated in the study:

Well when I was out of work, I obviously needed work straight away. I applied for permanent work, but a lot of the time the agency can get you work quicker... Well, they apply for you as well, so basically, rather than the long application process filling out form after form for permanent jobs, you send them your C.V and they send you through to interviews. It's a quicker option really.

The relative speed with which the agency can provide work was a key incentive for previously unemployed individuals like Baz. The fast access to employment opportunities that agency employment offers can also greatly benefit former students like James, who had recently graduated:

When I finished university I couldn't find a job from sending C.V's out so I

signed up to an agency to get myself some work.

After being posed a simple question about why they became agency workers, Baz and James answered in a similar fashion. Both experienced difficulties in their attempts to secure permanent employment, suggesting a preference for permanent work over agency work. In both cases, agency employment appeared to symbolize an inferior option that was resorted to in order to obtain financial stability. In these instances, agency work represented a form of employment insurance, and whilst regarded as 'plan B' by the participants, it was considered preferable to unemployment. Baz also hinted at the comparative ease in finding employment through an agency, and this was a recurring motive in the interviews. As a fellow agency worker, Yomi shared the perception that the agency greatly improved his chance to access employment:

It's just easier to go through an agency to get an assignment... It gives me opportunities through the agency, whereas, if you're not with other agencies the chances are you will not be aware of them, and they may not necessarily get in touch with you, so it's up to them to find out.

In his interview, Yomi described a shift in the burden of responsibility resulting from his status as an agency worker. In his experience, the agency he signed with played a major role, not only in aiding the search for employment, but also in the administrative elements of the employment contract once an assignment had been secured. By choosing to depend upon an agency for his representation, Yomi freed himself from many of the responsibilities often encountered by permanent workers, and in return, the agency received an hourly rate of pay for the time he spent on assignment. For Yomi, agency employment represented an easier option, and as a recruitment consultant, Jason suggested that this can be a key incentive for many others:

It's mainly the fact that a lot of graduates are taking a year out looking to gain some office experience to put on their C.V. Otherwise it is people who just generally can't find, or don't know how to go out and find jobs themselves. To be honest really they're just taking the easy option of going to an agency to do the work. If we think they're good enough, we'll try and place some jobs, but obviously if they're not good enough, we'll struggle to find work for them. We're the easiest option to find people work.

When reflecting on the role of his temporary employment agency, Jason identified himself as an easy option for individuals looking for employment. For some, agency work can symbolise a temporary solution to impending unemployment, and individuals may want to avoid some of the more time-consuming elements

associated with establishing a permanent position. As the experiences above illustrate, the temporary employment agency often alleviates some of the pressure individuals experience in the pursuit and obtainment of employment by accepting certain responsibilities. With minimal effort, a prospective employee gains access to a variety of employment opportunities that the agency may be able to offer individuals.

8.2.2. Flexibility

The flexible working opportunities synonymous with the agency employment industry represent a key incentive for prospective agency workers. Flexibility can manifest itself into agency employment in a variety of ways, from the agency's ability to match employment arrangements to individual circumstances, to the increase in the individual's control in the hours worked. This is one advantage experienced by Baz whilst on his agency worker assignment:

There is flexibility with the hours. I can make up the hours, or as an agency worker I can say: "I can't work Friday and Monday", and they can't really do anything in a way, unless, if I continue to do it obviously they'll get a bit annoyed by it, but I could say: "I can't work Friday and Monday", and this can be on Wednesday and there's nothing they can do about it. I mean I might not get paid for it because I haven't accrued the right days... and it hits me in that way but at the same time there is a bit of flexibility. Normally you wouldn't get that.

The absence of a traditional contract can often underlie the flexibility described by Baz above. After drawing comparisons between worker groups, De Cuyper, De Jong, De Witte, Isaksson, Rigotti and Schalk (2008) claimed that permanent staff felt locked into their jobs more than temporary workers. Baz recounted the perception of flexibility that resulted from his temporary contract, regarding it as a distinct advantage of his status. As another agency worker, Ivan described the effect created by the lack of such a contract:

The agency can call upon me to do flexible hours. I could also call upon them, as there is no contract stating I do 'x' hours a week.

The observations above indicate that Baz and Ivan perceived superior freedom to permanent workers in relation to the hours they were required to work. As Ivan highlighted, this greater autonomy is a product of the agency worker contract, as is the reduction in pay referred to by Baz. As stated previously in chapter four, an agency worker under a contract of service cannot be penalised for ending an assignment (BERR, 2009b), and this may translate into the increased freedom

described by Baz and Ivan. Whilst an immediate loss of pay may result, this consequence is still a product of free choice on the part of the agency worker. However, other participants recounted examples where freedom and control had been absent. Agencies often cite the variety of work they are able to offer individuals, yet in his experiences of agency work, Jamie argued that such freedom appeared absent:

Basically you're just told "this is what you're doing". You didn't really have a say. You could obviously say if you wanted to take on the job, but because it was purely agency work and you may have loads of work one week and then nothing the next, you did just have to take every possible assignment you could. You just drove yourself into the ground because you might not earn anything for the next month because there is not work available to you.

When pressed on the key causes of his anxiety, the presence of fellow agency workers was identified by Jamie as a major contributor:

Because there were so many people signed onto the agency, and so many people needed the money and regular work, you didn't feel you had the opportunity to turn down work saying "I don't feel like doing that", because someone else would quite comfortably take that off you, and when they've done that they're going to say yes all the time and take that opportunity. It will always go to them ahead of you if you've turned it down.

The lack of choice present in the experiences of Jamie above appears to contradict the claims of flexibility cited by the employment agencies earlier in the thesis. By possessing a pool of willing but unemployed individuals, agencies may inadvertently induce a climate of anxiety in its workforce. For those on assignment, the knowledge that the agency has access to many other workers looking for employment may be a source of apprehension and unease. In the case of Jamie above, similar feelings may be present within agency workers who are unemployed, greatly increasing individuals' reluctance in turning down assignments, however undesirable. Jamie's efforts to ensure his availability led him to sacrifice whatever flexibility his role allowed, an action that Henson (1996) also experienced with participants who attempted to curry favour with their agencies. Reduced flexibility and control may also exist during assignments. James identified the most prominent example in his agency assignment where the control of the agency workers was significantly reduced:

Working patterns I suppose. Because it was shift work there wasn't much negotiation over shifts, your boss decided and it was basically, it was un-negotiable. There wasn't much freedom to change your pattern of work around.

The example given by James above was in stark contrast to his permanent co-workers, and served to remind him how little control he possessed in comparison. His line managers rarely hesitated in awarding agency staff the most undesirable shifts, with the understanding that any resignations that resulted could be quickly filled. These actions meant the employer demanded flexibility from James and his agency worker colleagues, a demand that Rogers (2000) also encountered when reflecting upon the imbalance flexibility between the individual and the assignment. For many, the degree of flexibility that individuals experience on assignment undoubtedly varies, but agency work is also capable of providing flexibility with its ability to cater to the needs of individuals from a wide-ranging number of situations.

8.2.3. Stopgap/Just for the Money

Agency work can also be flexible in its ability to meet the employment criteria of individuals experiencing a variety of circumstances. Many agency workers may have pre-existing plans in place in the near future, and view agency work as an ideal way of maintaining a regular income until these plans come to fruition. These individuals often have little intention of building foundations for a long-term commitment to the agency or the organisation with which they are placed on assignment, and instead view the placement purely as a way to fill their free time whilst earning a wage. Tom was one such agency worker, as at the time of our interview, he was waiting to be placed into a permanent position as an airline pilot:

With both cases [of agency work] it was to fill time between starting a permanent job, so I had time to fill. I'd got a permanent job, so I filled that time.

Tom's permanent job began two months after the time of our interview, and the agency assignment he obtained provided him with an income over the majority of this time. For many, the earning of a wage can often greatly outweigh all other motives for employment. This was undoubtedly a key motive for Dan N's adoption of his agency worker role:

It's because I hadn't found any permanent work pretty much, and you've got to do something. Yeah, get some money in, yeah, that was it mostly.

Securing paid work was considered paramount by the vast majority of the agency workers in the study. When asked whether he was satisfied in his agency worker role, Yomi expressed this importance:

I'm happy, because it pays, at the end of the day, that's all that matters. No, I'm happy.

With both of these participants, the financial incentive of agency employment greatly outweighed all other motives. Benefits of agency work were often unexpected and considered a bonus, whilst the negative aspects were typically tolerated due to the need for income. The short-term nature of employment offered by agencies provides a platform for individuals who need to earn money quickly, but can also fulfil specific short-term requirements such as Tom's above. This often allows individuals to avoid becoming tied into long-term work commitments, leaving them free to pursue more desirable options in their work or personal lives. This was certainly true in Baz's case of agency employment:

I was looking for permanent jobs because of my circumstances. I'm actually moving locations, so I've stopped looking for permanent jobs and I'm happy to do the temporary work until I get a permanent job somewhere else in the different location.

Baz's perception of his agency role was little more than a stopgap between more desirable permanent employment positions. Such perceptions are common, as agency employment was rarely considered a long-term option by the participants of the study. The findings of Druker and Stanworth's (2004) research indicated that the agency workers who anticipated short-term assignment durations were less likely to develop strong links with the third party employer, and this perception was also witnessed in several of the current study's participants. James possessed a similar point of view during his agency role:

The agency work was a stopgap whilst I looked for something more permanent. This came up and it was going to pay me money straight away, so it was a stopgap before I could get something more permanent and do better.

For the participants above, the acquisition of a permanent position was considered preferable to the agency positions they held. However, agency employment represented a stopgap until a suitable permanent position could be found, and this may serve to temper any negative impressions experienced during time spent on assignment. The significance that participants placed upon obtaining fast access to paid work also coincides with research into the psychological contract, as emphasis upon transactional benefits like monetary exchange and reward is more likely to occur in short-term contracts (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006b), such as those possessed by agency workers. When viewed as a means for filling short periods of time, the flexibility that the agency employment industry can potentially offer individuals reaches a level that permanent working arrangements would typically fail to match. Despite such benefits, these levels of flexibility often have limits.

8.2.4. The Perils of not saying “yes”

One of the key objectives of recruitment consultants in the industry is the maintenance of a healthy assignment/worker balance, allowing the needs of individuals and companies to be met whenever possible. Whilst efforts can be made by the agency to maintain this balance, it can also be heavily influenced by factors external to the industry, most notably, the state of the economy. If an individual perceives there to be an abundance of assignments or a shortage of other agency workers, they may be more inclined to reject assignments with the expectation that another one will soon be offered. An example of such a perception is demonstrated by Mike below:

Quite a lot of the time they'd offer me work and I'd say I've already got plans for the day. It might be that friends had invited me out doing something for the day and that was too good an opportunity to turn down by saying “I'm working” when I didn't have to go to work. Because it wasn't a permanent job, it wasn't a fixed shift or anything, it meant I could take work wherever I wanted. So, yeah, that gave me good flexibility, so I could take the job I did want and not take the telesales that I didn't want, but also if I didn't want to work on a particular day I could say “oh thanks, but no thanks, I'm already busy”.

Mike's recollection from several years prior to the interview suggested an assurance that, despite rejecting assignments and ruling himself out of telesales roles, repercussions on the offers of future assignment would be minimal. He displayed a confidence in his position as an agency worker and a belief in the likelihood that another assignment offer would occur soon. However, the economic problems of recent years have meant that the scales of control have arguably tipped in favour of the agencies. Whilst individuals still possess the freedom to turn down assignments with the expectation of being offered more suitable and desirable options in the near future, the financial crisis that began in 2008 may well have manifested itself as an increased degree of anxiety regarding such rejections. As a result, there is now an increased likelihood that any assignment offer, however undesirable, will be snatched up reasonably quickly. Unsurprisingly, the individuals spoken to in the current study appeared all too aware of the potential risks of turning down assignments offered to them by their agencies. In his position as an agency worker, Dan N voiced this concern:

Sometimes, you can pick and choose your job, but at the same time you don't want to be too choosy, so you take on things you might not want to do, or aren't in quite the right timescale for you, and maybe sacrifice something else that you might think is coming up.

When asked whether this anxiety resulted from the fear that turning down assignments may have negative repercussions, Dan replied:

Yeah it can do, if people are too fussy, yeah. I've generally taken on things, nearly anything pretty much. I've had one they suggested to me where I'd had to have cycled a long way in the winter and it was just too ridiculous. [Name of recruitment consultant] seemed to be sure it wouldn't be too much of a hassle, but I looked it up on Google Earth and it was just about suicidal going along one of the small motorways. It just wasn't worth the risk, not for the money. The time spent commuting, train and cycling... some things you should just turn down with common sense.

The fear of turning down assignments existed to varying degrees in the majority of agency workers in the sample, and coincides with similar reports made in research by Henson (1996) and Rogers (2000). As an agency worker, Tom considered the employment agency's perception of the worker as a factor in that individual's decision to accept or reject an assignment offer:

If you turn down a couple of assignments you can really be looked at negatively. I think that people just don't call you anymore, and that's something you've got to remember. I think with temporary jobs you've got flexibility. You can just say "yeah, I'll leave tomorrow", that kind of thing, but then with permanent jobs, if you've been there for a little while you can quite happily leave and be quite flexible. You might say "I've got to take two days off, can I take it as unpaid leave?", and they'll probably agree to that. If you're in a temporary position, you probably won't get that, so it works both ways

In essence, an assignment rejection can be considered potentially damaging to the relationship between the agency and the worker. When asked whether his agency would react negatively to his decision to reject an assignment, Yomi replied:

Essentially I'd say yes. Whenever anyone turns down an assignment, particularly if the agency is desperate to place you there regardless of listening to you or not, then they do take a dim view of it.

Each participant above described awareness for the negative consequences that turning down an assignment may result in. The relationship with an individual can often be significant in the agency's decision to offer work, and as Yomi's perception above suggests, agency workers can be highly reluctant to reject assignments for fear of damaging this relationship. This belief is likely to increase the threshold of tolerance, which may cause individuals to accept assignments they would otherwise have rejected. In the case of Dan's discovery of a potentially dangerous journey to work, the negative aspects exceeded this threshold, and the assignment was consequently rejected. Whilst many individuals make a conscious decision to opt for

agency work and the benefits it can bring, others view agency work as a 'last resort' that they have been forced into due to difficult circumstances. Redundancy is one such circumstance.

8.2.5. Redundancy

Redundancies in the current financial climate have become common, and employment as an agency worker can offer one of the quickest ways back into work for those affected. For the companies involved in the distribution and employment of individuals, redundancies have had a key impact upon their experiences. Cynthia is a branch manager for a delivery company that had recently begun utilising agency workers, and was asked what common motives agency workers possessed:

Especially in this current climate, redundancies are big. They have no choice at the moment. They've been made redundant where they were, and they are looking around in a rather depressed market for another job.

Cynthia's company was experiencing an employment freeze on permanent contracts at the time of the interview, and had therefore begun relying upon agency labour for the first time in their history. By offering temporary agency positions to individuals who had recently been made redundant, Cynthia gained access to a pool of workers who were often well-trained, reliable, and eager for employment. In her position as a recruitment consultant, Julie also witnessed the impact that redundancy played in the attraction of new agency workers:

We mentioned redundancy. You know there are a lot of redundancies that have gone around. You know there are temporary roles that have come up, as there are temporary positions that we can offer people going through redundancy, until they find permanent roles.

As a fellow recruitment consultant, Simon also witnessed the effect of wide-scale redundancies upon the influx of potential agency staff:

We've had quite a few people recently in that exact situation: being made redundant. They come to us and we've had some of them who [are] going to start this Monday, in a very similar situation. They got made redundant from their current role, and went to come and temp for us. To be honest, not in such an involved role, but they have actually got a permanent role in the same organisation, at pretty much the same level, effectively at what they got made redundant at; same salary anyway. So yeah, it does help.

In their roles as recruitment consultants, Julie and Simon also described their experiences with individuals recently made redundant. In both instances, a preference for permanent employment is assumed by the consultant, and moving

these individuals back into such a contract is clearly a key motive. For individuals who have recently encountered redundancy, agency employment is often considered a second-rate option, and in Ivan's case, it was ultimately due to his difficult position:

As I said earlier, it's not exactly a forfeit because I wasn't given a choice. It was either working for [name of TPE], through the agency, or not at all. I didn't swap one for the other, but yeah I think there would be less security working for an agency.

When asked whether he was happy with his situation as an agency worker, Ivan simply replied that he would like to go back to his previous job. In his interview, Ivan clearly stated a preference for permanent employment, and described the lack of options which led him into an agency worker role. He cited the reduced security associated with his new temporary agency role, but went on to acknowledge his misplaced confidence in the security of his previous job, suggesting a greater awareness in his current employment situation. Reluctant agency workers like Ivan undoubtedly make up a sizeable proportion of workers employed by the agency employment industry, and the recruitment consultants interviewed understood that this may be the case with their staff. As a temporary employment agency branch manager, Nick P was quick to point this out:

I mean don't misunderstand me, I mean sometimes it is literally because there's no choice, they have to. A lot of the positions for companies are no longer advertised externally from agencies. If you go on the websites now you'll see that, probably about 90% of the positions if not higher are agency advertised, the majority are now outsourced to agencies, so for some candidates it's necessity... Depending on the type of candidate perhaps they're happy about that, or not so happy about that, but, it has changed.

The lack of choice described by Nick coincides with the experiences of Ivan, and suggests that a proportion of agency workers may feel pressured into the industry because they have little or no alternative. For these workers, agency employment can offer welcome relief financially, yet if given the option, many of these individuals would demonstrate a preference for a permanent role.

8.2.6. Preference for Permanent Employment

For many of the participants, a desire for the employment characteristics often associated with permanent employment was typically displayed. These characteristics often represented aspects that agency workers perceived to be missing from their experiences in temporary agency employment. When comparing

his agency role with permanent employment, Baz emphasised job security as his greatest concern:

I like the job I'm doing, but like I said, there's no security there. They could say that, when it came to the end of January, that could have been it, whereas if you were in an equivalent but same job, the security is there.

When asked how permanent employment would be preferable to his current agency role, Dan N voiced a similar sentiment:

I'd probably [prefer] a permanent role. It's just a bit more peace of mind, and you probably would get better paid.

When drawing comparisons between their current status as agency workers and their preferred status as permanent workers, Dan N and Baz considered reduced security to be a major shortfall in their current roles. The need to gain peace of mind is often central to an agency worker's desire to become permanent, as agency employment can often be perceived as comparatively unreliable. Jamie voiced his concern by stating that:

[In permanent work] you're guaranteed hours, whereas with this particular agency, you had to take what you were given, so one week you might do seventy hours and the next week you might do ten. The agency to start with definitely wasn't great.

The uncertainty described here by Jamie can generate an ongoing source of anxiety for agency staff. Despite providing the individual with income, this income may prove unreliable, making it difficult for employees to plan ahead. For Jamie, uncertainty often occurred on a weekly basis, creating a form of employment limbo which may prove difficult for the individual to manage. For Ivan, a negative perception of agency work was clear when he claimed that there were no aspects of agency employment that he preferred over permanent employment. Ivan was in his first agency assignment since his redundancy, and had therefore recently experienced permanent employment first hand. After experiencing both forms of employment in a relatively short space of time, his preferences were clear. Whilst the participants above were speaking from their positions as agency workers, other participants who had recently become permanent at the time of the study noted a preference for their permanent positions without exception. As a former agency worker, Sam described his reaction to the offer of a permanent transition:

Well I felt kind of relieved [about becoming permanent] to be honest, because having a permanent job is, is kind of, how do I put it... It's just safe and secure, and you don't have to worry about it as much.

By calling upon their previous experiences, the permanent workers in the sample were able to draw a variety of comparisons between agency and permanent forms of employment. For Sam, his time spent as an agency worker was a necessary part of the process for eventually joining his company in a permanent capacity. Interviewing former agency workers like Sam can help to avoid the possibility of a 'grass is greener' view of alternative employment that less experienced workers may make. An individual's preference for permanent employment may mean that they are engaged in agency work involuntarily, and distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary employment in agency work has been a key concern of many studies.

Tan and Tan (2002) reported that, in line with previous studies, the participants who worked in temporary employment involuntarily were less satisfied with their jobs. This perception was also present in the current study, although the anxiety which stemmed from reduced levels of job security was identified by participants as a greater concern. Correlating job performance with this perception has proven difficult for previous studies, as involuntarily working on a temporary basis may cause increased performance from individuals who desire permanent transitions into the third party employer. Despite a general consensus from former agency workers regarding a preference for more permanent working arrangements, the experiences accrued in agency employment were rarely dismissed as useless in aiding their resultant careers.

8.2.7. Experience/Future Employment Prospects

Agency working can lead to the adoption of new skills and, for younger individuals, may even provide some of their earliest employment experiences. Whilst some of the skills associated with the lower skilled work assignments in temporary agency labour may not prove to be particularly transferable, Julie suggested one of the less obvious benefits from the assignments she offers:

I think as a discipline obviously through working life, everyone having to get up in the morning, having to get yourself organised, and just having the experience of working in a team. Working within organisations is all good experience when you're starting out on your career path.

In her position as a recruitment consultant, Julie described a potentially important advantage that many workers may enjoy. Placing individuals into assignments can often expose them to professional working environments and structured workdays. In turn, this can provide useful experience when compared with the comparatively

unstructured days associated with the long-term periods of unemployment that many encounter. In his role as a recruitment consultant, Simon also highlighted similar benefits:

[For] someone who was not particularly experienced it would be an even easier way of building up a range of experience in office-based work. It's easier to get those kinds of agency positions than it is to leap straight into them on a permanent basis. So I say it is definitely beneficial for people with less experience. For people with more experience, it still is but probably less so, but it's probably better on the basis of how it looks on the C.V. to still be working than it does to have a prolonged period of unemployment.

Simon made a distinction based upon the level of experience held by individuals employed as agency workers. He suggested that less experienced workers may benefit to a relatively greater extent, whilst remaining in employment is regarded as a universal benefit that applies to every worker. In Mike's case, the benefits of agency employment were more wide-ranging:

It gave me a taste for different types of work and different companies. At the same time as doing the agency stuff, I was still applying for other jobs and just kind of did random days of work here and there for friends of friends, and that gave me a taste of different companies and how different people work and different types of jobs. So, yeah, it was quite interesting.

The variety of roles and tasks described by Mike can be a key feature in the experiences of agency workers, whilst Storrie (2002) suggested that exposing individuals to a greater number of firms may lead to better job matches. Jamie considered how the variation present within his agency employment experiences benefitted his general skills and awareness within the workplace:

You learn different trades quicker. You have to pick things up, just day to day life... you learn to work better, because you have to control things. You never know what's going to happen next, so you have to be a lot wiser with what's going on around you.

For both participants, agency employment represented an early stage of their careers, suggesting they may be more likely to benefit. For Mike, the advantage of experience was manifested in the sheer variety of assignments that he participated in. For individuals uprooted from their desired professions, such a benefit may hold limited appeal, yet for individuals in the early stages of their careers, the degree of variety that agency work may provide can represent a strong incentive. The benefits described by Jamie point towards a more general perception of experience and the advantages it can produce. The characteristic of variety cited by Mike may prove more useful for younger individuals, yet the experience of Robert in his first agency

working role suggests that such a benefit may also prove desirable to those who are further along their career paths:

Well my aim was to do something different, and having worked for one company for thirty-six years, you just got experience of that one company. My theory and thoughts were, let's do a variety of things so that I can get a good view of what else is out there, what you like, what you don't like, so you can get a better view of it, and also to put some different things on a C.V as well. That was really my [aim]; variety and experience.

For individuals considering an alternative career path, agency employment can represent an ideal platform where different job roles and companies can be experienced with little commitment or obligation. Tan and Tan (2002) highlighted the motive of self improvement as a potentially important reason for working as a temporary employee, concluding that it led to higher levels of satisfaction and satisfaction with personal growth. Tan and Tan (2002) claim that the large number of younger participants in their sample may have influenced their findings, yet Robert's example demonstrates that individuals of various ages can benefit from agency work in this respect. The six week assignment Robert was engaged in at the time of the interview provided an entirely new experience, and his discovery of a new and desirable temporary role led him to seek a permanent transition into the industry. The prospect of a 'temp-to-perm' route into employment can also be a key incentive for agency workers, yet making such a transition can often prove problematic.

8.2.8. Temp-to-Perm Transition

One of the benefits of agency working often forwarded by temporary employment agencies relates to the possibility of a 'temp-to-perm' transition. A temporary agency assignment can provide a potential platform for the individual agency worker to be evaluated and hired on a permanent basis by the third party employer, although evidence often varies as to how regularly these transitions take place. Whilst some agency workers have no desire to move into a permanent position with the organisation which they had been placed on assignment with, others do have this motive in mind, and consider agency employment their best chance of making such a move. Whilst waiting to hear back from his employment agency regarding a temporary agency role in a company possessing strong associations with his desired career path, Dan G summarised his hopes:

It's with a fairly big organisation, which I would quite like to work for, maybe in a different capacity. So it's kind of a foot in the door so to speak,

not particularly the role that I'd want to do, but it's a starting place.

Whilst such hopes may be dismissed as a product of wishful thinking, Dan had previously been offered a permanent role with an organisation where he had been temping, and had received some positive feedback from the agency when he enquired about the likelihood of any permanent transition that may result from impressive performance in the forthcoming agency role. At the time of our interview, he was waiting to hear back from the agency about the assignment, yet confirmation never materialised. In a follow-up interview, Dan described how the agency had failed to return his calls after telling him they were ninety-nine per cent sure he would be successful. For Jamie, the offer of a permanent transition did result from his time on assignment:

Eventually, after nearly a year in service through the agency, I went on into contract status. I was obviously hired through the agency with 'see what you can do' [attitude], then you go from there. You've got your own direction, whether you stay or go, and whether they want to get rid of you because you're agency.

Jamie joined his organisation in an agency role with the desire to become permanent. In this instance, the company used the time Jamie spent on assignment to evaluate him whilst on the job. A similar offer was experienced whilst on an agency worker assignment by James:

I couldn't find one [job] after university, so I signed up through the agency. One, to get me a job, be it temporary or permanent, because I needed the money, and two, because if it was going to be a temporary job I'd stand a better chance of finding something permanent.

James was asked to transfer to a permanent capacity whilst on his summer assignment, yet his lack of enjoyment and level of frustration during his time in an agency role led him to reject the offer. His employment agency later placed him directly into a more desirable permanent role. In these two instances, both participants were asked to transfer onto a permanent contract, with different reactions. Representatives of the temporary employment agencies interviewed during the study also discussed their encounters with these events, suggesting that such transitions can take place. After being interviewed approximately a year after the financial crisis in 2008, Jason described the likelihood of his client companies offering agency staff permanent contracts:

A high majority of the stuff used to be the case where they'll be temping out for them and then be taken on perm. That used to be a regular case, but obviously it's changed in the last eight months. There's just not been enough

work to employ people. That is mainly the case, especially in the industrial side.

Jenny was interviewed soon after, and from her perspective as recruitment consultant, described her experiences of the 'temp-to-perm' transitions made by agency workers into her client companies:

Last year, well last two years, one of my particular industrial clients probably transferred ten to twenty people onto their books, from temp. I mean they went there on a temporary basis. They temped there for a month or so and got taken on. We still supply the temporary workers there.

The experiences of Jason and Jenny above suggest that agency employment is a possible option for individuals looking to become permanent employees of a company, yet despite reports such as these, the majority of agency workers will not be offered this option. For individuals like James who do not desire a permanent transition, the absence of such an offer will have little effect, whilst for others, failing to receive such an offer could cause great disappointment and frustration. This had been the case for Rejani, who had recently migrated from India in the search for permanent employment, but found herself in an agency worker role:

I actually wanted to get a break into some type of job here. I was doing voluntary work, and, even the stuff from my C.V was not... I thought it would be better to go through an agency and get into temping work because usually if the employer likes us and they like the work we do, they actually make you permanent. So that was the main idea, the main thing I was looking for, to get an entry into the job market.

Rejani was well educated, and had qualified as an engineer in her native India, yet finding permanent employment in the UK suited to her skills had proved impossible. Agency work represented a last resort, and was only considered an option due to Rejani's belief that it would provide her with a permanent transition. The potential for such a transition often depends upon the motives of the company, which typically remain hidden to agency workers. Whilst companies like those who employed Sam and James may view agency employment as a method of informing permanent worker recruitment practices, others may see it as a purely temporary arrangement. Baz was asked whether he had witnessed any 'temp-to-perm' transitions into his company during his nine-month assignment:

No. Well, I mean there could have been, but you know it's not the kind of question you ask "did you used to be an agency worker before you were taken on full-time?", but since I've been there the agency workers who have started there haven't been taken on as permanent staff.

For individuals like Rejani who rely upon temporary agency employment for a move into permanent employment, the cycle of agency work must be a frustrating one. Whilst some may be offered a permanent role in a desired career either during, or at the conclusion of their assignment, others who are less fortunate may perceive a 'return to square one' situation, as their efforts in securing permanent employment fall short and the search for their next assignment begins. Rejani excelled during her agency role, yet was released by the company at the conclusion of her assignment. Whilst studies into national statistics (e.g. Amuedo-Dorantes, 2000) may be better placed to measure the proportion of agency assignments that lead to permanent roles, small-scale studies that focus upon individuals allow increased understanding over the desire and efforts to secure these transitions, as well as the consequences of failing to do so. The exploration of individual experiences in agency work suggests that a transition into permanent employment can be a possible outcome of temporary agency employment, and when investigating the motives of organisations for their utilisation of agency workers, the opportunity to assess the abilities of individuals during their time at the company is an undoubted benefit.

8.3. The Motives of Organisations

One of the key characteristics of the agency worker contract relates to the lack of commitment demanded from the parties involved. Whilst many of the resulting benefits for individual agency workers have been discussed above, the reduced degree of obligation also benefits the organisation looking to utilise agency employment. The ease of transition from agency to permanent has been expressed as one motive for individual agency workers, and the actions of third party employers can often reinforce these beliefs. In her management role recruiting administration staff for a major industrial company, Cathy outlined some of the key benefits for utilising agency workers:

Some of the temps that we've taken on in the past we've taken on permanently. The ones we brought in as temps are now permanent employees, so we get to see how they work, and if we like what we see, they can apply for the jobs that are coming up. It's more beneficial for us because we don't have to go through training again.

For Cynthia, her management role in a company self-imposing a permanent worker recruitment ban meant that the use of agency workers was essential. Despite these difficult circumstances, Cynthia described one unexpected benefit of this recruitment practice:

Once our hiring has opened up again, of the agency workers we have there are a number that we covet right now that we will be bringing on board. If they say yes, we would take them in a heartbeat.

As management staff from two separate organisations, Cathy and Cynthia both described how an individual's performance in an agency worker role can influence their decision to offer them a permanent position. For Cathy, this transition had occurred in the past, and provided access to a pool of potential staff that possess training and on the job experience. For Cynthia, the enforced recruitment ban prevented any transitions from taking place, yet several permanent contracts were likely to be offered to agency workers once the ban was lifted. For some organisations, the observation of agency staff during assignment can be a recurring aspect of their hiring process, as Sam experienced:

That's what they usually do, employ temporary staff, then give them contracts after six months depending how they get on. If they do enough and they're good enough for their job, and if they're happy with their job, then, they can proceed.

In Sam's example, his company offered him a permanent role after a period of agency employment. This method of recruitment is undoubtedly a product of the reduced contractual obligations inherent in the typical agency worker contract. This method of utilisation ties in strongly with the findings of Forde and Slater (2005), who reported that an organisation could initially employ individuals as agency workers in order to assess their suitability for a full-time role. This approach to recruitment encompasses several incentives and difficulties for companies.

Amongst the incentives is the standard agency worker contract (prior to the adoption of the Agency Workers Directive), which includes few of the obligations and employment rights that characterise the more traditional permanent worker contracts. This allows organisations to release agency workers without fearing the negative repercussions that may result from the dismissal of a permanent member of staff, providing an ideal basis for assessing the individual. Another benefit that agencies can offer client firms is the removal of responsibility for running a screening process, saving them time and money. This was especially true for one of the organisations encountered, as they worked in a high security industry and needed substantial background checks on all their employees. By adopting the services of a temporary employment agency, the organisation was able to forward the responsibility for these checks, saving time and effort.

However, such a benefit must be weighed against the negative aspects of agency utilisation, most notably the cost. In the example of employment practice Sam experienced above, the third party employer appeared to employ agency workers in an obligation-free probationary setting, allowing an in-depth and on-the-job assessment of the individual with little risk involved. However, such a practice would likely result in the increased hourly pay for each agency worker, as an hourly rate would be charged by the agency that provided them. This increased short-term cost may also stretch to a possible fee charged by the agency to the client organisation if they decided to offer the agency worker a permanent role in the company. In the example Sam describes, his company clearly felt that paying the increased short-term fees associated with the employment of agency workers was preferable to a more traditional permanent worker recruitment process, which may encompass longer-term costs and responsibilities.

8.3.1. Lack of Financial and Contractual Responsibility

By observing the employment of agency workers from the perspective of the organisation, the reduced requirement of financial and contractual responsibility emerges as an undoubted advantage over more permanent forms of employment. Discussions with permanent workers support this observation. As a permanent employee working alongside many agency worker colleagues in a major insurance firm, Dan C offered his perspective on his company's use of agency workers:

I think it's more a money thing at the moment. They can't take in any permanent staff, so they're taking in temporary staff. It's less of an expense then, if they need to get rid of staff. If they're struggling financially, they can just get rid of the temp, so I think it's more of a financial decision at the moment.

The utilisation of a temporary employment agency's services also has an added benefit for the company, as the responsibility for having an effective and well-staffed workforce can be shared between the two companies. By sharing this responsibility with the agency, the company can gain a greater degree of security and protection from the external market. For recruitment consultants like Jason, sharing this burden came with the territory:

Say, for example, you get a company that has won a big contract for three months. If they employ them direct, they have all the legislations to keep them on the books for sickness and so on. If they go for an agency, and there's something wrong with the candidate, they can replace them straight away. They're not tied to the actual candidate itself, so if they're doing a warehouse and they've got twenty people turning up, and five didn't turn up

because of illness, it's not their problem, it's [Name of TEA]'s problem to find a replacement to get them in there so the workload's not affected. Obviously if this large company lose a contract, the people are not on their books so the contract's finished, and they don't need the temps in any more. It's a swings and roundabouts, they may spend a bit more through an agency, but there's no security, as an agency worker. They can get rid of all agency staff.

By providing a hypothetical example, Jason described how the lack of individual security inherent in an agency worker's contract became a major benefit for organisations that were uncertain of their short-term futures. This coincides with the research of Conley (2002), who reported that the employers interviewed in the study did not view the sacking of temporary staff as a breach of the 'no compulsory redundancy' agreement they held with the unions. As a fellow recruitment consultant, Simon had also experienced apprehension from employers as a result of the economy:

The economy has obviously been hit, and companies to survive probably need more flexibility. There are a lot of people being made redundant in the past couple of years, and as the economy grows, companies are probably reluctant, and initially this happened in previous recessions, they expand, but they are reluctant to commit themselves to permanent employment, so will take on temporary workers. They may go permanent or there may come a stage where they feel safe, and they're in a position to take on permanent staff. So I think it is almost, not a buffer, but it almost offers a soft opportunity for companies to grow without committing themselves financially much.

When facing the uncertainty of an unstable external market, engaging the services of recruitment consultants like Jason and Simon sidesteps many of the risks associated with more permanent contractual relationships. The lack of security inherent in the agency worker's contract means that the employing organisation can cancel the services of individual agency workers instantly, and face little, if any, financial penalties for doing so. Rogers (2000) made this very point when indicating reasons for using agency staff, including reductions in benefit costs and unemployment compensation claims, as well as greater union avoidance. When combined with the ease of access to large pools of potential staff, another key motive soon emerges for organisations deciding to use agency workers.

8.3.2. Fast Increase in Numbers

For many companies, the influx of work can often prove unreliable and inconsistent, yet meeting the service demands of the customer may require a sizeable workforce. Possessing such a workforce 'in house' could prove a difficult financial burden for

organisations facing uncertain times, as the steady stream of future income required may not be forthcoming. Whilst agencies can protect companies from troughs in demand, they can also service the needs of organisations attempting to meet the requirements that peaks in demand produce. Organisations' experience of using agencies in this manner is a common one. In his position as a permanent member of staff in a 'silver service' company, Ben discussed why the short-term utilisation of agency workers was crucial:

Just because of the sheer volume. They had to [hire agency staff]. They couldn't sustain the workforce of the amount of people that were needed... I think it was the only way, to be honest.

In his middle management role at a major sporting venue, Nick M described his organisation's chief motive for the utilisation of agency workers:

They're just trying to get our staff numbers up [by hiring agency staff]. Yeah, fill the gap in our staff really. When our staff can't fulfil the need then they just bring in agency to plug the gap.

In her position in management, Cathy outlined how the flexibility of agency employment influenced her decision in hiring from this group of workers:

I need them, when I want to get them in quickly, I need to know that they're good, and I need to know that I can change them out if they don't fit into the company.

In the three examples above, the speed and ease of access to workers emerge as clear benefits when engaging the services of an employment agency. As a recruitment consultant, Jason was regularly required to fulfil these motives, and argued that convenience was central to such demands:

With agency, it's a quick fix... If a large company is looking for a quick fix for manufacturing or office or admin to cover holidays, rather than doing the advertising themselves, interviews themselves, they can just go to an agency and say "look, this is what I need, can you get someone to start say tomorrow or next week?", and we have to do all the process for them, the advertising and the sieving through C.V's, and make sure the candidates have got the right skill sets, and make sure that they turn up on the day.

Whilst similar in content, the experiences described above all relate to different industries, from a service-based organisation presented by Ben and Nick, to industrial-based work represented by Cathy, and finally office-based administration described by Jason. Temporary employment agencies can provide flexibility in several forms, but the study's findings appear to coincide with Reilly's (1998a) claim that 'numerical' flexibility is the most frequent form this flexibility can take. The

assortment of industries represented in the sample suggests that the fast access to staff that employment agencies can supply is a valued and transferable tool for a variety of companies.

8. 4. Summary

During the current study's investigations, the sheer variety of agency worker motives was a clear and recurring theme throughout. This variety has been reported in previous literature (e.g. CIETT, 2000; Druker & Stanworth, 2004), and understanding the motives of agency workers has become a challenging and complex process as a result, most notably for quantitative research (e.g. Tan and Tan, 2002). An example of the variety can be seen in an excerpt from my ethnographic field notes:

In the relatively small pool of people I met, underlying reasons for taking an agency role varied greatly. In one assignment alone, I encountered individuals possessing many wide-ranging motives. One had a long-term and well paid career as an airline pilot lined up in a matter of weeks, whilst another had left their employment after thirty-six years, with the desire to experience a variety of employment situations before resettling into another permanent role. Two students were there just to earn extra money to allow them to travel – one to travel the world before returning home to Australia, and the other looking to move to America in order to marry her boyfriend. Several individuals had recently migrated, and possessed varying higher education degrees, despite the relative simplicity of the role. One agency worker needed short-term work whilst recuperating from an injury that occurred during army officer training at Sandhurst, whilst another had simply failed to locate a suitable permanent role, and perceived agency employment as her best chance of achieving a permanent transition (Researcher's diary).

Despite experiencing an identical role provided by the same employment agency, the assortment of motives which led this small number of agency workers to the same assignment varied greatly. Quantitative methods of enquiry simply fail to account for such variation, yet understanding these motives can be vital in understanding the perceptions that each individual possesses towards their job. Ellingson, Gruys, and Sackett (1998) acknowledge this concern when stating that a single dichotomous scale is inadequate when assessing whether an agency worker is voluntary or involuntary, whilst other research cites the importance of establishing 'choice' when understanding the perceptions agency workers possess towards their agencies and client organisations (Von Hippel, Mangum, Greenberger, Heneman, & Skoglund, 1997).

The theme of choice occurred throughout the discussions with agency workers, but was often complex in nature. Agency work was regularly acknowledged as a flexible and useful form of employment that could suit a variety of circumstances. However, it was viewed as inferior to permanent working arrangements by the majority of participants, and was often considered a useful precursor to permanent employment by providing workers with a platform for permanent transition, or by allowing the individual to accrue work experience. This can create a conflict when judging the individual's 'choice' in pursuing agency employment, as they may cite the benefits of their employment status, yet view this status as 'second-rate' and undesirable when compared to permanent roles. A similar point is made in previous research by De Jong, De Cuyper, De Witte, Silla, and Bernhard-Oettel (2009; p. 247), who state that: "Voluntary acceptance of temporary employment does not necessarily imply a positive attitude towards temporary employment: rather, it might reflect perceptions of future or permanent job opportunities". As a result, classifying whether an individual is in an agency worker role 'voluntarily' can be a complex task that quantitative methods may struggle with.

The theme of choice was also influenced heavily by the individual's relationship with the employment agency. Individuals typically associated the regularity of assignment offers with the relationships they built with their agencies. A variety of literature has explored this relationship, and how it affects the individual's degree of freedom in their response to the offer of an assignment (e.g. Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Hall, 2006; Henson, 1996; Rogers, 2000). The participants of the current study also cited fears associated with the decision to accept or reject assignments. A frequent assumption throughout the interviews was that assignment rejection would negatively impact upon the relationship with the agency, and therefore the frequency of further offers of work, supporting Druker and Stanworth's (2004, p. 72) observation that "...some of the freedom of agency working may in fact be illusory" .

From an examination of the motives of organisations, the current research supports the literature in a number of ways. The increased need for flexibility has been cited by a number of previous studies (e.g. David, 2005; Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993; Forde & Slater, 2005; Kraimer, Wayne, Liden & Sparrowe, 2005; McClurg, 1999; Nienhüser & Matiaske, 2006), and temporary employment agencies are often regarded as well suited to meeting this need. By discussing this motive with a variety of recruitment consultants, the current study was able to explore the role of agencies from a perspective seldom reported by research. Flexibility is strongly linked with several benefits: most notably the ability to reduce costs during times of

depleted demand, and the ability to increase workforce numbers when demand is high.

Keeping workforce costs down was a recurring theme during discussions with organisational representatives. The need to reduce costs was prominent when discussing the utilisation of agency staff with one manager from an organisation experiencing a recruitment freeze for permanent employees. The decision to retain the services of an employment agency was not met with enthusiasm from the company's management, but the benefits of such a strategy are difficult to ignore.

For other participants, possessing an in-house workforce capable of meeting infrequent demands was regarded as too large a financial burden, yet the ability of an organisation to temporarily increase the number of workers can be crucial to success. This very point is made by Matusik and Hill (1998), Mauno, Kinnunen, Mäkikangas, and Nätti (2005), and Tregaskis (1997), and is strongly supported by the current study. In one example from an individual in the service industry, meeting the demands of major annual events required a large quantity of staff for short periods of time. Temporary employment agencies almost certainly represented the easiest route to achieving such an increase, and are recognised in this capacity by several participants.

By understanding the nature of the agency worker contract and the needs that temporary employment agencies can meet, the key motives behind organisations' use of employment agencies become clear. The agency employment industry can provide organisations with fast access to a pool of vetted employees with limited obligation, in a manner that no other form of recruitment can match. Despite the added short-term costs for organisations deciding to utilise the services of an employment agency, such costs can offset the variety of financial obligations and considerations associated with the recruitment of permanent staff. As the experience of one recruitment consultant above suggests, agencies can become a valuable and potentially long-term ally for organisations attempting to meet the demands of the external market place, allowing a mutually beneficial relationship to grow.

By assessing the motives of individuals looking to become agency workers and organisations seeking the services of temporary employment agencies, a picture begins to emerge of the role temporary employment agencies play in the UK labour market. This role will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter.

9. The Temporary Employment Agency

9.1. Introduction

The role of the temporary employment agency is ever changing as it seeks to adapt to the demands of an increasingly flexible labour market. As the previous chapter illustrated, the success of the industry depends upon its ability to meet the needs and motives of the individual agency workers and the organisations that seek their services. By meeting these needs over recent decades, temporary employment agencies have established and fashioned a place in the job market, often as a middle man in the recruitment processes of companies.

The chapter will begin by exploring the role that temporary employment agencies play in providing help to individuals and organisations, and how this role has been affected by the recent economic problems which began in 2008. The skills utilised by the recruitment consultants when carrying out this role will be explored, including candidate assessment and the establishment of strong working relationships with client companies. The success of the temporary employment agencies often relies upon its ability to meet the needs of individuals and organisations, and the balance between the two will also be considered.

The individual agency workers represent one major party for which temporary employment agencies must provide a service, and the interactions between the two will be explored. By comparing and contrasting perspectives from recruitment consultants and the agency workers, perceptions of commitment and support between the two will be considered. Agencies can often provide a series of benefits to the individual in relation to their future employment, and these benefits will be highlighted and evaluated. The section will conclude by considering the degree of security that the temporary employment agencies can provide to their individual agency workers, and whether these levels are accepted by the individual.

The second major party involved in the employment of agency workers is the third party employer, and their interactions with the temporary employment agency will be explored. The demands upon the recruitment consultants will be identified in relation to the frequency that new business must be obtained, and how this impacts upon the contact with their existing client companies. For temporary employment agencies, establishing and building relationships with third party employers is integral to their success as a business, and the main influences on these

relationships will be identified and discussed, most notably with respect to the 'temp-to-perm' transition that may often take place for the individual agency worker.

9.2. The Role of the Agency in finding Employment for Individuals

The role of providing aid to individual job seekers is a key characteristic of the agency employment industry (CIETT, 2000). The increase in unemployment and the reduction of available jobs resulting from a recession will have ramifications at an individual and organisational level. For companies, the advertising of an available role may lead to an increase in the number of applicants compared with previous years. Excessive numbers of applications represent an increased workload for the organisation, and a greater number of rejections for individuals. Temporary employment agencies are ideally placed to ease the recruitment process for companies, as well as provide communication and feedback for job hunters experiencing failure in their job applications.

For some, the need for temporary employment may arise from a position of vulnerability, in the form of recent job loss, lack of experience in the job market, or recent arrival into the country. Under such circumstances, the recruitment contacts and the support networks which temporary employment agencies can offer may prove invaluable, creating an increased degree of responsibility for recruitment consultants. It was in this role that Jenny was responsible for finding work for individuals going through life-changing experiences in their careers:

I think with a few candidates we have registered with us in the last year, they've been with one company for thirty odd years. They come to us, and they're shaking. They don't know what to do... Imagine being in one place for thirty years. I've been here five and it scares the hell out of me.

Workers like those described by Jenny may have accrued high levels of skill and experience, making them highly desirable and sought-after employees in the labour market. However, long-term employment in the same role may have an adverse impact upon relatively basic, yet essential, skills associated with the pursuit of employment. Agencies are ideally placed to offer aid with these skills, from C.V writing and interviewing techniques, to an individual's general presentation to prospective employers. For other more inexperienced job seekers, the underlying skills and experience may be absent, but the demands from the agency may be similar. Simon described how, as a recruitment consultant, the temporary assignments he offered inexperienced individuals may have proven beneficial:

It certainly does help people with less experience, so I suppose you could say younger people, I guess students. We've had people with various disabilities temping through us as well... They struggled to get work because of their disability... It works quicker than trying to apply for permanent roles, so if you've got less experience it's a way of building experience up. It helps people who are vulnerable in terms of not working and who need money.

Simon went on to describe his agency's role in providing migrant workers with employment opportunities that may have previously been unavailable:

[Name of city] is quite cosmopolitan, so you get a lot of nationalities... That can be advantageous because I'm sure if people have experience overseas it should, but doesn't always, get read the same ways by companies, and that can be a good way of transferring overseas experience to UK experience and then building upon that.

As branch manager of a temporary employment agency, Nick P had accumulated over sixteen years of experience in the industry. When asked whether temporary employment agencies can play a key role in finding work for potentially vulnerable groups, Nick P suggested that agencies were ideally placed to provide help:

Yes, but probably not as much as I'd like to though. It can help, because you have professionals that can market, and it is a market game. Although they are people, you still have to market to clients, and if they're vulnerable groups, you'd probably need to market a little bit extra, and actually weigh up the benefits and features for the clients... I think it's ideal for helping, if there are various things we do as an industry, but I do think there is a lot more we can do, and I do think that vulnerable groups need extra help.

The comments above paint a picture of the potential role agencies can play in aiding individuals. As the previous chapter illustrated, the temporary employment agency's representation can come as a welcome relief for the individual, who may view the recruitment consultant as a useful ally in their search for employment. As Nick described above, potentially vulnerable individuals may require extra assistance, and temporary employment agencies are ideally placed to provide it. CIETT's (2000) report highlighted the role temporary employment agencies could play in the provision of working opportunities to a variety of people, and the recruitment consultant interviewed in the research provided several examples of how this role could be fulfilled. In order to increase understanding of how the temporary employment industry is able to aid third party employers and individual agency workers, an awareness of the skills and abilities that agencies and their recruitment consultants could provide is crucial.

9.2.1. The Skills of the Agency

In their role as recruiters for an assortment of industries, temporary employment agencies must meet a range of individual and organisational demands. Exploring the range of skills and abilities developed by temporary employment agencies provides an insight into their role in the UK labour market. Some of the general recruitment skills that temporary employment agencies can provide companies are discussed by Nick P:

We are better, and we're trained as well. We know how to interview, we know how to assess, we know how to match. ... We are, without doubt, more skilled at finding the right people for the roles, because we actually ask all the right questions, and get all the right information from the relevant people. When we're interviewing them, we use competency based interviewing. We use all the skills.

Avoiding disappointment for the individual agency worker and the client company is one of the key aims for any temporary employment agency. Effective application of skills and abilities when securing a successful match between the two is integral to the success of a recruitment consultant, as Jason described:

The main thing is that you've always got to listen to what the client's looking for... and when you're explaining the roles to the candidate when they come in, you make sure they actually want the job. You always try and put them off first. That's the hard part, making sure they actually want the job, especially in the current climate. They said they'd do anything, but really when you say: "look I've got a cleaning job", you've got to make sure they'll be there on time, because if they don't turn up on the first day they won't use us again so we have to make sure the matches are up to key.

Achieving a strong match between the needs of the company and the skills and characteristics of the individual was a key concern shared by all recruitment consultants in the sample. Building a relationship can help the employment agency understand the needs of the client, and this is undoubtedly integral to the success of these matches. For Jenny, adopting a personal approach in her role as a recruitment consultant was highly beneficial when building this relationship:

I think the personal level we've dealt with clients over the years, the honesty that we have with them. I'm not bad mouthing high street agencies whatsoever, but it's all very target driven isn't it...very 'salesy' based, whereas with me it's more of a case of "right, we need to get the right people for the job", as opposed to just working towards numbers.

The recruitment consultant's skill in managing a successful and mutually beneficial relationship with the client company is clearly central to Jenny's role. When

considering the best approach for establishing a strong professional relationship, Jenny rejected the target-driven culture that she believed had been integrated into the working practices of large-scale 'high street' agencies, and instead chose to favour a more personal and focussed approach when determining the needs and demands of the client company. Simon was another recruitment consultant who took a similar view on the importance of customer service:

We're not particularly 'salesy'. Don't repeat that to my manager, but we're not particularly 'salesy'. We're more customer services orientated, and it tends to suit the local market a bit more. We've got branches around the UK, and some of the other areas will feel more receptive to a more 'salesy' approach. In [name of city] less so in honesty, so we tend to just believe in customer service. We still do sales, we market ourselves out there, but quite softly softly.

By meeting the needs of individuals and organisations, recruitment consultants establish a base of skills focussed upon achieving success in the attraction, assessment, and placement of individuals. A successful and well-run agency will possess consultants who have developed expertise in recruitment that staff in other organisations would struggle to match, making them a valuable commodity for companies and job seekers. One of the key abilities employment agencies must exhibit is the capacity to fulfil the needs of both these parties, and this can represent one of the key challenges that recruitment consultants will face.

9.2.2. Meeting Two Sets of Needs

One feature of the agency employment industry's role in the market place is the requirement to cater for the demands of two groups. For the agency, meeting the needs of the company will be much more profitable than fulfilling the requirements of the individual agency worker. The needs of the company are more likely to be ongoing, and may result in a long-term and mutually beneficial relationship between the agency and organisation. As a recruitment consultant, Simon has experienced the development of such a relationship:

We've got three sizeable clients, and then a series of smaller ones. It takes time to obviously grow smaller clients, and maybe they're not actually such a small organisation, but they'll only give you a little bit of work... We've had a few companies over the years... who have started out quite small but expanded, and taken us with them.

The experience that Simon described above illustrates the emergence of a mutually beneficial relationship between an organisation and a temporary employment agency. For organisations, building and maintaining long-term relationships with

employment agencies may prove crucial in meeting constantly shifting demands, yet for the individual, long-term reliance upon an employment agency may represent a rather unappealing prospect. As a result, the relationships agencies build with individuals are far more likely to be short-term, suggesting that any favouritism that agencies show towards organisations may prove unavoidable. As a recruitment consultant, Jason described this effect:

At the moment, the clients are generally always going to be a little bit more important. At the moment, clients are so hard to come about, while the candidates are so easy, especially if I'm looking for a warehouse role. I want to make sure I'll be making my clients happy. I can advertise a role for a warehouse [role] and I'll get fifty C.V's, but at the end of the day the only hard thing is you've got to let a lot of candidates down, because I can't find them all work. With clients it's easy for them to pick and choose what they want... There's personally nothing else I can do for the candidate. It's generally all I'm doing, taking orders from the client, and trying to fill them.

When asked as a recruitment consultant whether he had ever experienced an imbalance in commitment between the agency worker and the client company, Simon replied:

You can have a temp with you for a couple of weeks or even less, so I think it's human nature in those instances. You've probably built up stronger relationships with that company than the candidate.

Developing an initial supply of temporary staff into a long-term business relationship with an organisation can be integral to an agency's success, and will become a priority as a result. In contrast, the opportunities offered to agency staff may often be short term, making relationships between agency workers and their agencies harder to forge. The priority placed upon the needs of third party employers by recruitment consultants like Jason and Simon also results from the source of the temporary employment agency's income. As Rogers (2000) pointed out in her research, it's the client companies that pay for the services of the agency, ensuring that the loss of a client represents a greater threat to an agency than the loss of an employee. The underlying motives individuals possess may also have a negative bearing upon this relationship. As a temporary employment agency branch manager, Nick P described an example where the commitment from the agency worker may prove unreliable:

Commitment levels can be very very low. There are agency workers with worries about lifestyle choices, but their lifestyle might be they just need some money to buy a ticket to go to a festival... so once they've got that money in their head, that will be the end of their commitment. We know that

sometimes (laughs), but we have to work with it. You have to try and find the flexible work for those people, to get their commitment if you actually put them into a long-term role. Conflicts can come because they're not the right match.

The example Nick provided is highly specific, yet hints at an underlying perception that many agency workers may well possess towards their temporary roles.

Employment agencies regularly deal with relatively flexible short-term working arrangements, and the reduced levels of commitment and obligation individuals often demonstrate towards these assignments could be considered an unsurprising consequence. Whilst on a temporary agency working assignment, I recorded behaviour by a fellow agency worker that demonstrated this lack of commitment:

At the start of a six week assignment as an exam marker, I and my team of agency workers took part in a day of training with the author of the paper. Prior to beginning the marking of 'real' exam papers, we were required to go through a standardisation process over the course of the first day. One agency worker went through this process and then left, as they were offered a permanent role which they had recently interviewed for. The loss of a staff member reduced the group's initial output, and required the company to provide another day of training for the replacement agency worker. The agency was also inconvenienced, as they were responsible for immediately filling the vacancy under difficult circumstances (Researcher's diary).

In order to meet the demands of their roles, recruitment consultants must understand and fulfil the needs of individual agency workers and the third party employers. Findings from Tan and Tan's (2002) research support this very point, as they argued that an individual's level of job satisfaction and performance will be increased if the temporary employment agency takes their needs, constraints, and motives into account when paring them with an assignment. The experience I outlined in my work diary demonstrated how achieving this balance can prove difficult. The importance of building effective relationships is highlighted by the participants, making effective communications between the parties vital. The agency's interaction with both these groups will now be explored in greater detail, beginning with their interaction with agency workers.

9.3. Interaction with Agency Workers

For temporary employment agencies, interaction with the agency workers on their books represents an important aspect of their business. Individuals will regularly approach several temporary employment agencies, so maintaining positive relationships with these individuals is an important part of a recruitment consultant's role. A temporary employment agency can improve this relationship by providing

individuals with support, benefits to future employment, and job security, and each of these areas will be explored. The chapter will continue by considering the main influences on agency worker perceptions of commitment towards their temporary employment agency.

9.3.1. Agency Worker Commitment to the Agency

For many of the participants, commitment towards the employment agency often varied. A key characteristic which can negatively influence perceptions of commitment was highlighted during a discussion with Dan G during his time as an agency worker:

I had barely any interaction with the agency, other than sending hours to them at the end of the week.

Whilst individuals may regularly communicate with their agencies during the search for employment, agency workers who are placed into an assignment typically possess a perspective similar to that outlined by Dan above. During his time as an agency worker, Baz expressed a similar view when asked about his commitment towards the agency:

Well I'm obviously more committed to the people I work with. I mean obviously the people who got me the interview with this company and that, but I never hear from them. All I have to do is send them my timesheet at the end of the week... I'm more associated with the company than I am with the agency.

The lack of contact Dan G and Baz described above is typical of many of the relationships concerning agencies and their agency workers. When drawing comparisons between an agency worker's levels of commitment between the two organisations involved in their employment, the greater association with the third party employer described by Baz proved to be significant. Proximity and regular contact can be integral to the formulation of these perceptions. When asked who he felt more committed to, Tom reached a similar conclusion:

I'd say more to [TPE] because they're the people I'm doing the task for. I do see [TEA] as a middle-man still... In terms of doing the job, total commitment to [TPE]. Much more so than to [TEA].

For Tom, the temporary employment agency represented a middle-man that had profited from finding him work, and this perception prevented him from formulating any strong feelings of commitment towards them. Agencies are responsible for placing their workers into assignments, yet once this has taken place, any further

contact is often limited to the individual's submission of timesheets, and little else. This is a recurring characteristic in agency employment that can often undermine the relationship between the agency and the worker. During her time as an agency worker, Rejani described another potentially negative influence upon the formulation of organisational commitment between individuals and their agencies:

I think when you're a temporary employee, you always think of gaining more money. Why? Because you know that the employment is only temporary, but when it is a case of permanent, you know there is a frequent cash inflow which is coming every month and is going to be there for a long time. I think when you get a temporary job you're always looking for a high rate of pay, because you're not sure how long the job is going to last.

As noted in the previous chapter, one of the most common reasons for pursuing agency employment is the need for fast access to income, and whilst agency work can be well placed to meet this requirement, any resulting reduction in job security can create a sense of instability. When compared with long-term permanent roles, agency work represents a relatively unstable employment path. The desire to offset the relative precariousness inherent in agency work can result in an increased focus on the short-term financial incentives, most notably the hourly rate of pay.

The short-term cyclical nature of temporary agency employment can result in agency workers possessing an increased, and frequently renewed, desire to seek more secure and better paid employment. As a direct consequence, agency workers may ultimately demonstrate less commitment to their assignments. For more experienced agency workers, a pre-existing expectancy of low commitment may well exist, yet when the agency appears to go above and beyond these expectancies, perceptions of reciprocity and appreciation may well emerge. Tom had worked as an agency worker in several assignments for various employment agencies, and was keen to point out the efforts made by his most recent agency:

They've gone about trying to get tax breaks on lunches... They're trying to get us holiday and things like that, and they try to add an extra service to that... and I quite rate [TEA] for that. There's been no talk of anything like that [with previous agencies]. It's just been: "You're just here to do the job. We found you it. Here you go".

Because of his prior experiences, Tom possessed low expectations of agency work, but he reacted in a positive manner when his most recent agency had exceeded his expectations by securing him additional and unexpected benefits. Tom's relationship with his agency was improved when he perceived that they had supplied benefits of their own freewill, coinciding with Eisenberger, Cummings,

Armeli, and Lynch's (1997) claim that organisational efforts would be better received if they were perceived to be discretionary by the employee. The possession of low expectations may be common for agency workers, but when experiencing actions perceived to be above and beyond these expectations, individuals can respond in a grateful manner. It is fairly common for agency workers to experience different employment agencies in their search for work, and this can often lead to a variety of experiences. Individuals may well face poor treatment from some agencies, yet these difficult encounters may lead to increased feelings of commitment from agency workers when they interact with more caring and approachable agencies. A sense of loyalty towards the agency became apparent when Robert was asked whether an increased offer in pay from another temporary employment agency would cause him to move:

Personally, I would probably be loyal to the people that have seen me right. Basically, I would probably say I'd stay, disregarding that if it's for double or five times. But yeah I would be loyal I think.

The concept of loyalty occurred throughout the interviews with participants, yet for many agency workers, the decision to sign up with more than one agency occurred frequently. From an outside perspective, it could be perceived that such an action would damage the relationship, yet the employment agency representatives in the sample almost universally rejected this conclusion. Simon was one such consultant:

We don't but we should, commercially, ask exactly where people have registered and what they are doing. But we do ask what they'd do if they got a role with another agency, but we don't tend to ask on registration whether they're with any other agencies as such. But it wouldn't stop us putting them into or let a role pass them because of that.

In his interview, Nick P reiterated the need for agency workers to avoid limiting their options, but also indicated that concerns regarding an individual's decision to sign with multiple agencies do exist:

As a rule, it doesn't have too many implications, but it does happen. It can be infuriating if you've marketed someone out, because you've said you're going to market them out and told them they are only registered with you and you find out they're actually working somewhere already... Ideal world... exclusivity is the best way for everyone. But these days, don't limit your options and deal with everyone.

During his interview, Nick outlined an ideal scenario, where dealings between the agency and the worker remain transparent and simple. Whilst such a situation may improve relations and ease the recruitment process, the worker's overriding desire

for employment prevents such a system for taking place. When dealing with the needs of agency workers, recruitment consultants may encounter demands that simply can't be fulfilled by a single agency. This may cause individuals to seek the services of multiple employment agencies in an effort to increase their chances of obtaining preferable assignments within a short space of time. For the recruitment consultants above, an individual's decision to sign with multiple agencies is viewed as an understandable one, especially in the current economic climate, yet the comments of Nick suggest exclusivity may be a preferable, yet unrealistic, alternative.

9.3.2. Agency Worker Support

Due to the cyclical nature that often characterises agency employment, temporary employment agencies are capable of providing an individual with support at every stage of their work. This support can begin during initial contact, continue throughout the agency worker's employment, and conclude with the completion of the assignment. Advice and assistance can be offered at each stage, and may prove highly beneficial to the worker. Rejani joined her temporary employment agency soon after migrating to the UK, and received support before entering her first assignment:

They actually informed me that there's a scheme where you don't have to pay the national insurance for a couple of weeks from the first day of entering the UK. If they hadn't have informed me, I would never have known about this thing and never claimed it. I think they have been really good, and guided me really well.

In the passage above, the helpful nature of the temporary employment agency described by Rejani gave rise to feelings of loyalty and commitment. Such instances may foster perceptions that cause agency workers to reciprocate in ways similar to Rejani. However, this positive experience was preceded by the approach to several agencies, all of which demonstrated little interest or support in the difficulties faced by Rejani. Her experiences illustrate how an agency can be ideally placed to provide support on a variety of employment issues. In his interview, Nick P reflected on how his role as an agency branch manager had progressed from simply placing an agency worker into an assignment:

It's evolved. Now you're council, on all sorts of issues to be quite honest... We've got help lines, we have contacts for occupational health, but on a lower level, [agency workers] actually come in and confide and talk through their problems, which are non-related to work.

As the excerpt above illustrated, Nick placed a great deal of emphasis on his employment agency's ability to provide an accessible and effective network of support for the agency workers it employed. However, the provision of support may not always occur. In her interview, Polly contrasted the relatively small and independent temporary employment agency that she worked for as a recruitment consultant with large scale 'high street' agencies, casting doubt on the support networks they provide:

If they've got a hundred temps out in one place, they won't be able to monitor one individual that's got a complaint.

As Polly suggested above, achieving an equal balance of support between the client company and the individual agency worker can prove difficult, and may not always be in the agency's best commercial interests. When discussing the shortfalls in agency support with the sample of agency workers, the lack of sick pay was regularly cited as a key concern. Agency workers can provide cover for permanent staff suffering from long-term absence due to illness, yet when experiencing similar problems themselves, support from temporary employment agencies and third party employers is typically absent. During Jamie's time as an agency worker in the catering industry, the perceived lack of support became a major cause for concern during a long-running stress-related illness:

There was definitely a lack of support, because the demands and the stress of the job you were assigned to made it harder to carry out that particular work... Because it was agency, you missed out on the normal statutory sick pay. You had no other form of income, so there were plenty of times where you've been working through a huge pain barrier. If you were on a [permanent] contract, they wouldn't let you work at all, but you felt you had to maybe hide that you were unwell and you were having these problems because you couldn't afford to tell your agency. You definitely thought there was no leeway or any support.

For permanent workers in the catering industry, the presence of a potentially infectious illness would result in a compulsory leave of absence with sick pay. Jamie understood that an enforced break would be likely, but sick pay would be absent and his position would be filled by another agency worker. This led him to hide his symptoms in order to remain on the assignment, at the expense of his health. For Jamie, the support required from the employment agency was not forthcoming, yet other agency workers on assignment may see such support as unnecessary and potentially intrusive. Baz provided one example of how his agency's support and involvement was unnecessary:

If I'm ill I'm supposed to phone my agency to let them know. [They] would then let my employer know, but it seems pointless because it's only just delaying it. I always just deal directly with my employer rather than the agency.

During Baz's time has an agency worker, the temporary employment agency represented a spare part that obstructed his communication with the client company. The contrasting demands of the agency workers highlight the difficulties faced by temporary employment agencies when providing support for individuals. In order to meet these demands, support may often need to be tailored to suit the individual, placing greater strain on the recruitment consultant.

9.3.3. The Benefits to Future Employment that Agencies can provide

Agency working can provide several benefits to future employment, most notably in the form of on-the-job experience and skill acquisition. However, the temporary employment agency is also ideally placed to educate individuals in a variety of other ways. Initial contact between the individual and the temporary employment agency often takes the form of a relatively informal interview, allowing the recruitment consultant an opportunity to examine how the individual conducts themselves in such a situation. In her role as a recruitment consultant, Jenny was able to provide open and honest feedback to a prospective agency worker:

I had somebody come in once, leaning back on their chair, not looking at me whatsoever. I'd ask them a question and they'd just sort of grunt... I'm saying "are you willing to work?", and you're just shrugging your shoulders at me. That to me doesn't look very good.

The feedback provided by Jenny may have led the individual to address the obvious mistakes, improving their employment image accordingly. Temporary employment agencies will often view agency workers as their representatives, making them reluctant to place workers that they feel may damage their image or relationship with the client. For some temporary employment agencies, initial interviews may only form part of a wider evaluation process. Nick P described the in-depth assessments he carried out as a recruitment consultant:

We do competency based interviewing... we've got a full assessments package and it doesn't just measure the software skills, it also measures personality skills. It's got a 'will do' and a 'will fit', so it gives a guide depending on the roles.

The forms of assessment outlined by Nick above can provide an in-depth collection of data that may benefit the individual's placement. The resulting information could

represent strengths and weaknesses, skills and abilities, and potential jobs and career paths that the individual may not have previously considered. The quality of assessment often depends upon the temporary employment agencies undertaking them. As an agency worker, Robert reported varying degrees of quality in the assessments he received from several agencies:

It was just a one-dimensional snapshot of myself... whereas this particular agency did take time to speak to you to try and understand what you've done and what you might like to do... I was really impressed with the way they did an assessment.

In Robert's experiences, the quality of the assessments carried out by agencies varied considerably. In his most favoured assessment, Robert felt that the agency went further in trying to understand his past experience and future aspirations. A quality assessment often leads to quality feedback that may prove useful to the individual. Whilst many workers who complete an assignment may seek further opportunities from the agency, many others will choose to leave the agency. After deciding to leave his assignment and employment agency to pursue higher education, Dan G described his reaction to the lack of feedback provided by his agency:

I think, at the end, when I finished with the organisation, it would have been quite nice to get some form of appraisal or feedback on my performance... That would have been quite good to have had that from the agency, you know for help with future employment.

Despite spending several months on assignment with the same client organisation, Dan received no formal or informal appraisal on his efforts from his agency. By failing to provide an appraisal, the temporary employment agency missed an opportunity to pass on potentially useful information that Dan could have called upon in future roles. This does not represent an isolated case, as Druker and Stanworth (2004) have also indicated the rarity of feedback or evaluation experienced by agency workers. Whilst the agency may not have considered Dan's future employment, other agencies make this a priority when considering possible assignments for their agency workers. Despite carrying out an undesirable assignment, James argued that the agency had his longer-term aspirations in mind:

They always said "this job that you're doing now is a stopgap. We're looking for something more for you; something permanent for your career".

James strongly desired a permanent role, and after spending several months in a temporary assignment, his employment agency secured him a preferable

permanent position. For other agency workers in the sample, a perception existed that the employment agency prioritised the placement of the agency worker in an assignment, with little consideration for the individual's preferences, skills, and aspirations. Baz expressed this belief when commenting upon his agency's assessment process:

That's the reason they do test, so they don't look stupid by putting some random person in who can't do the job... I think they assessed me quite well to begin with, but I'm not sure how much they actually, care (laughs)... I don't think they particularly think "well that candidate will be good for that job"... They're obviously trying to get you work because it benefits them.

In Baz's case, he perceived his assessment as a process aimed at protecting the employment agency's reputation. An effective assessment can benefit each interested party, yet Baz reported no personal gain. After completing several agency worker assignments for different temporary employment agencies in two major UK cities, Tom described the disappointment he regularly encountered:

Rarely did they come up with something where I thought "that's something I want to do". Very rarely, in fact never (laughs). None of the temporary jobs have been ones where I've thought "I really want to do that".

The experiences of Tom suggest that fulfilling the desires of the individual agency worker may not be a priority for the temporary employment agency. The variety of assessments can provide the agency with a strong understanding of the individual, and improve the chances of successfully matching them with an assignment as a result. In Tom's case, such matches were not forthcoming.

9.3.4. The Security of Agency Working

As previous chapters have demonstrated, the levels of security inherent within agency worker contracts are low when compared to permanent contracts. Penalties for the immediate cancellation of agency worker contracts are often absent, making them an attractive prospect to employers attempting to remain flexible. Rejani experienced a negative consequence of her status as an agency worker. A sudden and unexpected drop in available work led the organisation to send her home for the day with no pay. Interviewed soon afterwards, Rejani argued that such treatment should not occur:

When they say temporary work, they should be sure that's it's for like a week or two weeks. It should not be that they could terminate it at any time. Even if it's a temporary job it should have a timeframe saying that "we will hire you for one month and we will pay you for one month".

Robert echoed some of the concerns of Rejani, voicing frustration with the uncertainty of his short-term future as an agency worker:

I guess they could then break it into chunks and work it out and say “we can definitely guarantee you two weeks work, there’s a possibility it could go on for four weeks but we’ll pay you for two weeks”.

The measures described above are typically absent from an agency worker’s contract of employment. Increasing organisational flexibility is an important motive behind the utilisation of agency workers. By increasing agency worker security, the temporary employment agency would forfeit the client company’s flexibility, risking the loss of their custom. Yomi described how his role as an agency worker has had wider ramifications upon his life:

The flexibility is a result of the position that one finds oneself in. Now, with the flexibility comes the lack of compensation... It’s a little bit disappointing. It’s just that, with that comes the inability to plan, medium to long-term. Because of the uncertainty that comes with it.

Yomi voiced frustration over the difficulty stemming from his role as an agency worker. An inability to plan is a recurring experience for agency workers who remain uncertain about their future. Permanent workers can book holidays and time off many months in advance with relative ease, yet many agency workers lack the long-term employment stability required to do this. Availability is a key concern for many agency workers, and such plans may prevent this. Similar examples were reported by Conley (2002) and Henson (1996), as participants in their samples felt it necessary to avoid situations that would make them temporarily unavailable to their agencies and risk sacrificing their access to future assignments. In the excerpt above, Yomi argued that a perceived trade-off between flexibility and job security took place. As Yomi’s manager, Cynthia was asked whether she thought this trade was fair:

No, it’s probably not a fair trade, but in some cases it’s the only choice they have... Some people come in with the thought that “I’m not important, so I like that fact that I can walk out of here” and, that’s happened, quite a bit. It depends upon the calibre of the person being sent in your direction.

In her experience, Cynthia suggested that the increased degree of flexibility for agency workers is outweighed by the reduction in job security. This lack of job security is rarely debated, yet many advocates argue that security is traded for employment benefits that are typically absent from permanent working arrangements. In his role as branch manager, Nick P had taken steps in securing

redundancy pay for his agency workers and a requirement for organisations to give a week's notice, yet argued that the majority of other agencies could do more:

Other agencies, they do risk a little bit, with playing with flexibility... But I would say probably in the life choice it's a fair trade. In a buoyant market it's excellent. It goes back to, if they weren't happy, then they can leave and go to another job straight away, because it's two ways, isn't it?

The freedom described by Nick is often emphasised by advocates of the industry, suggesting that the organisation's freedom to cancel a temporary contract is offset by the ease with which agency workers can leave their assignments. In his role as a recruitment consultant, Jason argued the information provided to the individual agency worker makes it clear that their position remains precarious throughout their assignments:

You live and die by the sword. You know you are going to an agency and you know you are going to be a temp, so you shouldn't think that you've got guaranteed security in your job, because at the end of the day you are just a temp. As soon as we go through the rules and regulations of what you're signing up to, you know that this contract could finish any day, rather than "oh at least I've got a guaranteed six month contract". You haven't.

For Jason, agency work undoubtedly represented a precarious and uncertain employment experience for the individual, and making this clear to his agency workers from the outset was important. Whilst agencies may find it difficult to control some of the less desirable characteristics of the employment opportunities they offer, they do possess a responsibility for fully informing the worker of this situation. For many of the participants in the current study, the existence of informed consent was often influential as to how they perceived many of the resulting incidents of the assignment. When the agency workers were fully informed by their agencies on the risks associated with their assignment, the negative aspects of their ensuing experiences were often reported in a far more favourable manner. One such example is demonstrated by James during a discussion on the negative aspects of an undesirable agency worker assignment he encountered:

You knew what you were getting into. It was all made clear to you before you started. Yes, they made it very clear what you'd be needed to do, a mundane job, and that was what you were there to do because that's what the company needed.

As a result of his agency's enquiries and cautions, James' acceptance of a boring and unattractive role was fully informed. This gave him a sense of control, and when combined with knowledge of his agency's attempts to secure him a permanent

position with another company, his negative reaction to the assignment was undoubtedly tempered.

9.4. Interaction with Third Party Employers

Whilst communication with agency workers represents a major part of the agency employment industry, interactions with third party employers are equally important, if not more so. The relationship that emerges with the client company can be crucial to the success of the agency, and the transition occasionally made by agency workers into the organisations where they worked on assignment can prove influential to this relationship. The next section will explore these factors, but will begin by exploring the balance that temporary employment agencies must achieve between the attraction of new client companies and the reliance upon existing clients.

9.4.1. Rely on Same Clients or New Business?

Securing new business was an important concern for the recruitment consultants interviewed during the study, along with the relationship management of existing client companies. As Nick P described in his role as an employment agency branch manager, achieving this balance is a key influence on the success of the agency:

Obviously your backbone is your existing client base, but you're always looking to develop new business... You need to fill up with new clients to replace the natural loss of clients that you will get either from another agency winning the contract, or no longer requiring temporary staff downsizing. In this current environment obviously companies are going bust, so you've got to do new and existing, but [probably] the major part of most people's business is probably 60 per cent existing and 40 per cent new.

As Nick suggested above, a successful temporary employment agency often relies upon a regular and recurring client base, whilst new business must be secured to offset any drops in demand from regular clients. Creating and maintaining long-running relationships can lead to several advantages, even if their demand for workers is sporadic and irregular. In her role as a recruitment consultant, Jenny experienced several of these clients:

What we find is that we have clients where we might not place there for a year or two years, but they always come back to us.

For many organisations, agency workers may represent a steady stream of labour, yet for others, any influx may be infrequent and minor. Understanding these varying needs is an important part of the recruitment consultant's role. In Jenny's

experience, the benefits of fulfilling these needs may not be immediately apparent, but providing a good service may lead to repeat business in the future. In his role as a recruitment consultant, Jason also placed a strong emphasis upon the customer service levels received by his client companies:

I try to attract new customers, but a lot of it is getting repeat business. I've obviously built the relationship up and they'll always come through me. It's mainly building a rapport, and obviously in the current climate it's pretty hard. My service is mainly customer service. What they want is what they get.

By building a rapport with new clients, over time, Jason had secured a strong base of regular customers. Meeting the demands of these clients was integral to Jason's role in his temporary employment agency, and focussing on customer service helped him fulfil this role. By personally dealing with the clients he had cultivated, Jason emphasised the importance of the relationship between his temporary employment agency and the company they were providing a service for.

9.4.2. The Agency's Relationship with the Client

The relationship between the temporary employment agency and the third party employer was considered highly important by the recruitment consultants in the sample. Effective assessment of the individual can be integral to a successful placement, but in order to accurately match them with a third party employer, a strong understanding of the company must be reached. As a recruitment consultant, Julie stressed the need to recognise the characteristics of their company clients:

We need to ensure that the clients are happy with the candidates and vice versa... Then we can match the right temporary workers to the role... You really have to know the working environment that the temporary workers are going into.

In the above excerpt, the main priority for Jenny was the achievement of a successful match between the individual agency worker and the third party employer. By satisfying both parties, recruitment consultants are increasing the likelihood of future business from the organisation, and improving the experiences of their agency workers. As an agency branch manager, Nick P argued that understanding the company was integral to the very success of his agency. When asked whether establishing a strong relationship with the client was important, Nick answered:

Yes. That's just a simple answer. You've got to; otherwise you're not going to be around that long. It evolves to always looking for, and sometimes pre-

empting, the changes in the client's workplace, to be proactive in the change in your workforce.

By describing his agency's ability to pre-empt a company's labour demands, Nick enforced the need to develop a strong knowledge base regarding his clients. One consequence of a strong relationship between the temporary employment agency and the third party employer can be a joint reliance between the two companies. Cultivating strong ties with temporary employment agencies may prove highly beneficial for companies. As a result, it is often in the third party employer's interest to maintain a healthy working relationship with the agency. As a manager for an industrial company that had recently begun to use agency workers, Cynthia described the importance of maintaining this relationship:

It doesn't matter who you're dealing with, you have to have a good relationship. First of all, if you don't, they will not be considerate when they're sending you people. It's the same with anything else; you don't bite the hand that feeds you. You have to be constructive in what you're asking them to do... and that you're not talking down to them or being unreasonable.

For Cynthia, building a strong relationship with the agency can help to establish a potentially useful affiliation that may lead to several benefits. Hall (2006) highlighted several such advantages, including an organisation's potential to save on recruitment, selection, induction, and training and development costs. Developing a positive association with the agency can provide the organisation with a quick and effective avenue for boosting staff numbers, often at short notice. As a recruitment consultant, Simon described how his agency can become integral to the fortunes of a company, and how this integration provided the edge over other competitors:

I mean no agency is irreplaceable, but yes I think we get to know companies' mindset. We have a better feel about that company than our competitors, and it's the only way really that you're going to be able to fundamentally compete with other agencies [with the] same people on their books... You match [the individual and company] as close as possible... you only get that from really building up knowledge of a company, and of candidates, over a period of time.

As Simon highlighted, many agency workers choose to sign with multiple agencies in their search for work. As a result, agencies in close proximity may occasionally provide the same product, i.e. the agency worker, to their clients. In order to outperform competitors, the temporary employment agency's knowledge of their client and the level of customer service they can provide become crucial to success. As an office manager of a company that regularly utilised agency workers, Cathy described the lengths to which her temporary employment agency goes when

meeting her demands:

I've got a really good consultant... We've got a really good working relationship. She knows what I need and she really fulfils that need. She goes above and beyond, even at weekends. If we get stuck at weekends, I've got her mobile number so I can contact her at home.

For Cathy, the working relationship she had built up with her recruitment consultant allowed her to address staff issues quickly and efficiently. As a result, Cathy was able to maintain the effectiveness of her workforce, even when experiencing planned long-term leave or unexpected short-term absence. By providing this support, the temporary employment agency was entering into a mutually beneficial relationship, as their services would be called upon before their competitors.

9.4.3. Effect of 'Temp-to-Perm' Transition

For individual agency workers, the option to move onto a permanent contract represented a favourable outcome to a temporary assignment. Little is known in the agency worker literature about the perspective of the temporary employment agencies when these developments occur, making reactions hard to predict. When discussing the effect that an agency worker's temp-to-perm transition can have on the relationship with the third party employer, the recruitment consultants of the sample typically responded in a positive manner. In such a role, Jason described how the transition can positively influence the relationship:

It generally builds it up, because we've found the right person for them to work for, so obviously that looks ideal. It affects me because it comes off my budget, but the fact that they're on to their books now, I've done my job.

For Jason, the organisation's decision to place his agency workers onto a permanent contract was the ultimate positive feedback on his efforts to match the two. Effectively matching agency workers to the client company is regarded as a sign of strong performance on the part of the recruitment consultant, and will typically enhance the relationship and increase the likelihood of future business with the company. All the recruitment consultants interviewed by the present study reported strong, positive feelings associated with their client's decision to permanently recruit their agency workers. This was also case in Nick P's role as a recruitment consultant, although he also reported a momentarily negative reaction to hearing this news:

Initially, totally 100 per cent honest, the feeling you get initially is "oh, there's another temporary staff member I'm down". Then you get the warm

glow of “I’ve done my job right”. It affects it in a positive [way] with your client, because they realise that they’ve actually found a member of staff that they might have been looking for permanently anyway... it’s just the initial “that’s another one off the books” (laughs), but really that’s the only downside to it.

Although the feeling is initially tempered by a negative reaction, Nick understood the benefits of these transactions taking place. The loss of agency workers to permanent contracts is an outcome that recruitment consultants will often experience. Third party employers deciding to offer the agency workers permanent contracts will often inform the agency, and in many cases, provide a fee to compensate the agency for the loss of a staff member. However, in Simon’s experience as a recruitment consultant, the third party employer did not always follow these guidelines:

The only time I suppose it would be detrimental is... where someone would temp there, and then the company would say “we don’t require the person any more”, but then offer them a permanent job, and not tell us. That’s obviously detrimental to our trust for that company... That wouldn’t help our relationship with the client, but you just feel that if they were going to do that, then there maybe would be other things they would be slightly dishonest on... I mean even in this market, if someone was doing that we would stop working with them, to be fair, depending upon who it was, but probably.

For Simon, the action taken by third party employers described above was perceived as a breach of trust, and consequently damaged the relationship with the client. Simon described at least two occasions where the above events took place, and in both cases, he was informed of the organisation’s actions by the agency workers he had placed there. For Simon, the sense of betrayal felt towards the organisations was tempered by the feelings of loyalty that the agency workers demonstrated by informing him. The experiences of Simon demonstrate how the relationship between the agency and the client can be negatively affected by a covert transition for an agency worker. However, when the agency’s guidelines are properly observed by all parties, ‘temp-to-perm’ transitions often represent a ‘win-win’ outcome for all concerned.

9.5. Summary

Whilst a great deal of research has considered the perspective of individuals involved in the agency working industry, the position of temporary employment agencies has rarely been explored (Biggs, Tyson, MacDonald, & Hovey, 2010). As a result, comparing and contrasting the present study with pre-existing literature becomes problematic. The thesis supported previous research in relation to the

benefits temporary employment agencies can provide to potentially vulnerable individuals, most notably the research of CIETT (2000) and Druker and Stanworth (2004). The current study reports the provision of aid for several groups highlighted by previous studies, including young people, the long-term unemployed, migrant workers, and individuals experiencing career transitions. Another group was also highlighted as potential receiver of employment agency help, in the form of individuals who had experienced long-term work in the same role.

Another interesting finding resulting from the interviews with recruitment consultants related to the prioritisation placed on the needs of the individual agency workers and those of the third party employers. As Rogers (2000) reports, the agency receives payment from the client companies, not the workers, suggesting that the loss of a client poses more threat than the loss of a single agency worker. An emphasis was placed by the recruitment consultants on the needs of the client company, and these had undoubtedly increased due to the recession.

Levels of organisational commitment towards the temporary employment agency varied among the agency workers in the sample. Limited contact was regularly cited as an antecedent to low levels of security perceived by individuals towards their agencies. This strongly coincides with the findings of Hesselink and Vuuren (1999), who argued that their participants viewed the agencies as responsible for arranging work and paying wages, and little else. This effect is comparable to the research of George and Chattopadhyay (2005), who investigated how the varying employment practices of four organisations in the US influenced the perceptions of the contract workers on their books towards them. In the organisation that most resembled a UK temporary employment agency, contractors exhibited significantly lower levels of 'identification with the employer'. This outcome is unsurprising when viewed in light of the current study's findings. The limited contact and the perception of the agency as a 'middle man' often damaged the relationship between individuals and the temporary employment agencies in the current sample. As a result, the temporary employment agency typically adopted the role of a 'silent employer' in the minds of the agency workers, and the reduced levels of 'identification with the employer' reported by George and Chattopadhyay (2005) are a likely reflection of this.

Instances of increased commitment in the current study's sample of agency workers were also comparable to previous findings in the literature, most notably those of Connelly, Gallagher, and Gilley (2007). In their study, Connelly et al (2007) argued that the levels of affective commitment related to the agency worker's 'voluntariness'

for being temporary, and that increased affective commitment may indicate the individual's gratitude for receiving preferable assignments. Whilst the lack of preference for temporary employment indicated by the study's participants makes the first half of this conclusion difficult to apply, the agency workers who positively perceived the agency's decision to offer them an assignment undoubtedly communicated greater levels of commitment towards their temporary employment agency.

The level of flexibility that agency workers can offer organisations is an important incentive for their utilisation. Whilst the hourly cost of agency workers is likely to be greater than newly-hired permanent staff, the absence of other typically long-term costs will encourage companies to create and fill potentially insecure and at-risk vacancies with agency staff. As a result, job insecurity may be inherent in an agency worker's assignment, whether they are aware of it or not. Studies on comparable agency and temporary worker samples typically described increased insecurity (Allan & Sienko, 1997; De Cuyper, Notelaers, & De Witte, 2009; Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Feather & Rauter, 2004; Forde & Slater, 2006; Hall, 2006). The research designs of quantitative studies will often rely upon comparisons between temporary and permanent worker groups. Whilst agency workers in the current study were able to recount their immediate feelings of doubt and anxiety, the interview also allowed them to voice their preferences for future employment. A clear preference for permanent employment repeatedly emerged during interview with the agency worker participants, with frequent references associated with 'peace of mind' and 'fewer worries'. By voicing this preference and highlighting increased security as a key factor for this preference, the agency workers of the study regularly demonstrated clear concern over greater insecurity in their roles.

Research into agency worker employment rarely incorporates the perspective of the temporary employment agency, although research into the Australian agency employment industry by Hall (2006) represents an exception. The temporary employment agencies approached in Hall's (2006) study argued that levels of job security were increased by the possibility of permanent transition and the likelihood of back-to-back assignments. Findings of the current study differ slightly, as temporary employment agencies were often keen to highlight and inform agency workers of their limited security. Failing to inform agency workers may subject them to unexpected losses of employment, an example being Rejani's experience of suddenly being sent home.

Whilst the current study offered several pieces of anecdotal evidence surrounding the frequency with which agency workers are offered the option of a permanent transition, generalising these findings to national level is highly problematic. Compared with large-scale quantitative research models like Amuedo-Dorantes' (2000) study, small-scale qualitative studies could be considered ill-equipped when attempting to establish the regularity of temp-to-perm transitions. However, the thesis was able to give a rare insight into the effects that such a transition may have upon the relationship between the temporary employment agency and third party employer. Findings also supported those of Hesselink and Vuuren (1999), who argued that the majority of workers stated a preference for a permanent job in the future. Agency employment was rarely identified by the agency workers in the sample as preferable to permanent employment, although individuals had rejected permanent transitional offers when the role offered was perceived to be similar to the role of the agency worker's assignment.

The current chapter has focussed upon the temporary employment agency and the relationships it holds with individual agency workers and the client companies it services. The next chapter will now explore the interactions that agency workers experience whilst on assignment.

10. The Third Party Employer

10.1. Introduction

In chapter eight, consideration was given to the motives that lead individuals and organisations to pursue agency work, whilst chapter nine was concerned with the temporary employment agency's role as an employer of individual agency workers and a provider of staff to client companies. For individual agency workers, the majority of the experiences associated with agency employment will be encountered whilst on assignment with the third party employer, and it is these experiences that the current chapter will focus upon.

The chapter will begin by exploring the treatment agency staff receive at the hands of the third party employer. Many of the perceptions agency workers possess about this treatment results from the comparisons they draw with the permanent staff of the third party employer, and these comparisons have informed many of the study's findings. The perception that agency workers can be unreliable was also identified, and the chapter will continue by exploring how this influences the company's interactions with its agency staff.

The current study has utilised several psychological concepts in order to understand the effects that agency employment can have upon individuals. The vulnerability inherent in the contract, the employment practices of the third party employer, and the increased understanding of their employment's instability have all influenced how agency workers develop feelings of satisfaction, commitment, security, and perceptions of support. These variables, and their antecedents, will be explored in detail.

The current chapter will conclude by exploring the interactions between agency workers and the pre-existing permanent workforce present in the third party employer. Permanent staff's reaction to the utilisation of agency workers, and the isolation and segregation that can result from a company's' employment practices, may heavily influence the experiences of agency staff, and these effects will be considered.

10.2. The Treatment of Agency Workers

For individuals, the time spent on assignment will represent the majority of their time as agency workers. The motives that led them to agency employment may

determine their initial actions, expectations, and outlook, whilst interactions with the temporary employment agency will strongly influence their view of the industry. However, the time spent with a third party employer may stretch to weeks, months, or even years, and the treatment individuals receive over this time may have the greatest influence upon their perceptions of agency employment.

10.2.1. Permanent Workers are Treated Better

In the majority of these assignments, agency workers will find themselves working alongside, and/or taking instruction from, permanent staff. Agency workers will often formulate perceptions regarding the treatment they encounter from the third party employer by drawing comparisons with the treatment received by equivalent permanent workers in the company. When recalling his time spent as an agency worker, Jamie highlighted strong contrasts in levels of treatment received by agency and permanent staff:

The full-time staff were treated like gold, whereas us agency workers were nobodies... They were told when to have their breaks and when not to have breaks. They got to keep their tips when they were doing silver service waiting... You don't get any tips or bonuses. You had to go to the people that were [permanently] employed. Only full-time staff employed on contracts were allowed to keep it.

In Jamie's example, permanent members of the organisation experienced treatment that strongly differed to that received by the agency staff, despite carrying out the same work. The company's policy on tips established a clear division resulting from employee status, and prevented Jamie from feeling part of the team. Another example of poor treatment was cited by Mike, who recalled a negative experience at the conclusion of an agency working assignment:

I worked at a theatre company moving the production team in... I was finished by four in the afternoon, but then I had to wait about an hour outside the manager's office to get my timesheet signed... I think they thought if they mucked me around long enough I'd just give up and go home and not bother chasing it up... I think it was because I was an agency worker they were trying to pull a fast one. They were trying to rinse me out.

In his agency role, Mike worked alongside several permanent workers, whose contractual arrangements ensured they would not encounter the difficulties he did at the conclusion of his assignment. Mike felt the treatment he received was a product of his agency status, which ensured the organisation failed to treat him with in the same manner as their permanent members of staff. The courtesy Mike demonstrated in waiting patiently to be seen was a product of his reluctance to

intrude and risk alienating the management, and thereby jeopardising future assignments with the company. The desire to impress the third party employer was regularly reported by the agency workers in the sample, yet overly-simplistic tasks often made this difficult. As an agency worker, I noted this problem during an assignment:

The nature of the assignment meant bursts of work when deliveries arrived, meaning my fellow agency workers and I were frequently asked to clean the workspace between each delivery whilst the permanent workers understandably did very little. Workspace cleanliness left little for us to do. In order to look busy, I would keep hold of larger pieces of rubbish to give the illusion of looking busier than I was. The boredom resulting from the absence of work led me to comment that I wished there was more rubbish just to give us something to do (Researcher's diary).

The desire to make a good impression was made extremely difficult by the basic, unnecessary, and short-lived nature of the tasks that were demanded by the organisation, leading me and my fellow agency workers to feign productivity. The aim to secure a permanent transition was a recurring motive in the sample of agency workers, yet the lack of complexity or skill inherent in the roles of these workers often represented a barrier to achieving this target. By presenting themselves as suppliers of short-term flexible staffing arrangements, temporary employment agencies may unconsciously instil this perception into its client companies. Rogers (2000) highlighted this issue by arguing that, in contrast to permanent employees, agency workers were seen as a means for bringing in low-priced workers to do low-priced work. The difficulties encountered by agency workers were also considered a problem by several temporary employment agency representatives. When asked in his role as a temporary employment agency branch manager whether negative treatment occurs during agency worker assignments, Nick P replied:

Yes, it happens fairly regularly. Not as much as it used to... I don't think it will ever be stamped out. Obviously it's not something that we condone. As soon as we find out about it we go and investigate. We look for parity in pay, we're looking for parity in conditions, but you will always get dinosaurs that say "well they're temps, I'm not going to pay them the same", but they want the same job.

The perceptions of some third party employers which Nick had encountered indicated an inherent belief that agency staff should work at least as hard as their permanent counterparts, despite experiencing lower pay and poorer working conditions. The lower tenures inherent in many agency working assignments may

represent a significant barrier to the complexity of tasks these workers are able to perform, and the resulting need to shift these tasks onto permanent employees may well damage their trust in the organisation (Pearce, 1993). The problems experienced by agency workers on assignment may result from the third party employer's view that agency workers are more likely to accept inferior treatment due to their eagerness to impress and secure future employment assignments with the company. Failure to carry out potentially excessive requirements may not result in the dismissal of the agency employee, yet the short-term nature inherent in many assignments allows the organisation to bypass such an outcome. An example of this action was described by Ben, whose permanent role with a service-based company placed him in close and frequent contact with agency staff:

They tried to use the same temps for the difficult jobs, and waiting tables and stuff. I guess they couldn't keep a close eye on everyone, and if they weren't good enough or if it was noticed they wouldn't have been rehired.

The employment practices described by Ben above are heavily stacked in favour of the third party employer. The ability to request the services of alternative individuals from temporary employment agencies for future assignments allows organisations to indirectly punish agency workers' failure in meeting the requirements placed upon them, even if these demands are unrealistic and disproportionate to those asked of equivalent permanent staff. For agency workers who are desperate to secure future working assignments, complaining about poor treatment represents a potentially dangerous option that could damage the individual's future employment prospects with the company, and may have negative repercussions with the temporary employment agency. As a result, the agency workers in the sample possessed strong reservations about voicing their concerns to their employers.

10.2.2. Agency Workers are Treated Differently if they Complain

The inherent fear of complaining demonstrated by the agency workers of the sample typically surfaced when discussing the third party employer's likely reaction to their criticism. Participants were aware of the precariousness of their employment arrangements, making them highly reluctant to be seen 'rocking the boat'. James voiced this belief after he was asked why his opinion as an agency worker would not be valued as highly as a permanent worker by the organisation:

Because you're the agency worker. You're easily replaceable, because they can just go back to the agency and say "it's not working with this person, we want someone else". If you're a permanent member of staff, the relationship is a bit different... whereas with an agency worker, they come and they go, so

building a relationship isn't as important.

The organisation James worked with regularly employed high numbers of agency workers to cover the more undesirable and unsociable working hours, which unsurprisingly led to a high turnover amongst this worker group. The working practices of the organisation created a divide between the permanent and agency workers, ensuring that the treatment each received became markedly different. During an agency working assignment, I experienced an example where contrasting treatment occurred between worker groups:

As an agency worker, I spent an assignment in a 'factory-line' based role that involved placing containers onto a conveyor belt. During my time, the machinery experienced several long-lasting technical problems, bringing production to a halt. The company's underlying desire to 'get their money's worth' meant the agency workers were asked to continue working for large portions of the shift by undertaking the highly monotonous and non-essential task of assembling cardboard boxes, whilst the permanent employees took the time to relax, talk, and get refreshments (Researcher's diary).

As a result of their agency worker status, individuals found it very difficult to complain about contrasting treatment, knowing that they could easily be replaced by the third party employer. This led agency workers to accept employment practices that would have been strongly opposed by permanent workers. Experiences such as these also indicate an absence of autonomy, as tasks are frequently simplistic, mundane, and recurrent. However, despite regularly experiencing reduced levels of autonomy, several participants argued that this was related to the lack of experience inherent in the agency staff within the workforce.

10.2.3. The Reduced Tenure of Agency Work, and its Influence on Autonomy

For many of the study's participants, the lack of autonomy represented a frustrating characteristic that was absent from the roles of their permanent counterparts. Reduced control and an absence of opportunities requiring personal initiative ensured that agency workers like Tom possessed difficult employment experiences:

I had a call centre job, and it involved explaining to shareholders the new situation for the shares that they owned following a merger... A lot of these people were asking a lot of questions that weren't on the script we had, and we got shouted at for giving any kind of answer that was outside the script... You were literally a robot. There was no input from you at all.

Tom's main task was to provide customers with peace of mind following a major company development, yet found that his freedom in providing any non-scripted

reassurance was incredibly limited and highly criticised by the management. The restriction of autonomy can often create a division between agency workers and their permanent counterparts, even if differences relating to pay, job descriptions, or responsibilities are relatively minor. By reducing Tom's opportunities to demonstrate choice or personal initiative in how he fulfilled his professional responsibilities, the company translated his role into a highly simplified procession of mundane tasks. Another method employed by organisations looking to simplify the role of its agency staff occurred by restricting access to situations which demand autonomous decisions to be made. In his management role for an organisation that utilised agency staff, Nick M described how his company's reaction to workers' mistakes was strongly influenced by their status:

If we [permanent workers] make a decision, and it turns out to be wrong or right, it's not really mentioned either way because that's just the way it is. If an agency worker did something off their own back that turned out to be wrong, I think that could have heavy repercussions. Why were they put in that position to be making those decisions?

Nick's company experienced a regular influx of agency staff to cover the major sporting events it catered for. When compared with the pre-existing permanent employees like Nick, the agency workers often possessed limited experience and relatively low levels of company-specific knowledge. To combat these shortfalls, the organisation attempted to limit agency workers' exposure to situations requiring autonomous decisions to be made. Several agency workers in the sample reacted negatively when opportunities for freedom of thought were restricted.

Due to the cyclical and short-term nature of the assignments which often characterise agency worker employment, a common occurrence may frequently be reduced tenure, and the barrier to experience it represents. Short tenures were prevalent in the study's agency workers, partially coinciding with research in Germany by Mitlacher (2008) which argued that shorter assignment duration and higher turnover rates often led to lower job quality for agency workers. As a result, many of the participants considered any differences in treatment agency workers received as symptomatic of these features. The agency workers in the sample frequently demonstrated a clear preference for permanent employment, and considered the greater valuation that organisations placed upon their permanent staff as a valid reflection of the existence of stronger ties and increased commitment. When asked whether he thought the difference in treatment he received as an agency worker from his employer was fair, James replied:

Yes, because I think a lot of the permanent staff had things to do which required a fair bit of training, and I don't think they saw value in training up a temporary member of staff who could be gone within twenty four hours.

During James' assignment, he witnessed a clear deficit in the levels of training received by agency staff in relation to their permanent counterparts, yet understood the company's actions. The provision of training can create an unspoken agreement between the worker and the organisation that can prove mutually beneficial. The individual is obtaining potentially long-term skills and abilities that could prove helpful to their career, whilst the organisation is increasing the effectiveness of its workforce. The company's investment in training an individual can only be reciprocated if they remain within the workforce, whilst an individual's decision to leave the organisation soon after the training will negate the employer's benefit.

10.2.4. Agency Workers can be Unreliable

Limited access to training often represents a consequence of the ease with which agency workers are able to leave an assignment. The lack of long-term employment assurances associated with agency work reduce the likelihood of potential longer-term benefits received by companies, instilling a reluctance to provide agency workers with the potentially costly training schemes received by permanent members of staff. This was a concern described by Cynthia, who was often tasked with training the agency workers hired by her company:

It's when they surprise you. When you try to train someone up and literally four shifts later they're saying "bye", or sometimes don't even say "bye". They just disappear, and it takes you a couple of work shifts to realise "oh my god they're not coming back". It's the same with the agency; they just disappear from the agency too. It's not consistent... It's better to have hired staff. People take being hired a little more seriously than they do with a temporary job. They [agency workers] also seem to have an attitude where they say "do I really have to come in?!"

For Cynthia, the high turnover rate of agency workers she experienced became a constant concern, as the nature of the work demanded time-consuming training in security procedures and health and safety protocols to be completed. The example she described occurred frequently, with each instance representing a loss of investment in her time and effort. The reduced contractual obligation and perceived lack of commitment inherent in their employment led many permanent workers to voice the opinion that agency workers were unreliable. Whilst many agency workers view their employment as temporary, short-term, and non-committal, others desiring a permanent transition may be highly committed to their third party employer.

The reduced demand for accountability and obligation inherent in the agency working contract often led permanent workers to view their agency worker counterparts as unreliable, yet the considerable variety in assignment length may also influence this judgement. Open-ended assignments can potentially last for weeks, months, or even years, yet shorter-term assignments may only last a matter of hours. In his management role in a major sporting venue, Nick M reported how this could lead to a clear difference in how agency and permanent staff reacted to the demands of their roles:

The permanent staff got motivation from the fact that they can see the bigger picture, whereas the agency staff obviously come and go and don't see what we're all striving to do. Sometimes it can look a bit disorganised and a bit unstructured, but only because they can't see it on a continuous basis; that in fact if they didn't do it then and there, it may not end up with the outcome we need.

Nick's company regularly held large-scale events that required agency worker help to prepare and disassemble. The agency workers were often required to carry out simple and mundane tasks that represented a minor part of a far larger operation, yet they rarely witnessed the outcome of their efforts. The short-term assignment and lack of context for their efforts in the role may have contributed to the reduced levels of commitment and motivation in the agency staff reported by Nick above, which can in turn negatively impact upon the views of the permanent members of staff. The segregation that can result from such short-term usage can have a detrimental influence upon the integration of agency staff into the third party employer, whilst agency workers who reside in their assignments over a longer period of time report a far greater level of integration into their adoptive workforce. James was in his agency assignment for several months, and was asked whether he had felt accepted at any point by the permanent workers:

By the end of it yes, because I think after a while you gradually become accepted. It depends how long you've been there for how long it will take for you to be accepted. After a couple of months you tend to feel part of it.

The level of integration that James achieved later on in his assignment indicated that his status as an agency worker was not the main contributor to the difficulties he experienced. Tenure can be significant to the extent to which agency workers are accepted into the pre-existing workforce, as it can demonstrate feelings of obligation that many permanent workers may have assumed were absent from the individual's outlook. The acceptance he received was viewed positively by James, yet his experience suggests that the short-term nature inherent in many agency

working arrangements will prevent many agency workers experiencing integration and acceptance from their permanent colleagues.

The experiences and treatment encountered by agency workers whilst on assignment, and the perception of unreliability held by employing organisations, can prove detrimental to individuals in a variety of ways. The chapter will now continue by considering how these experiences and beliefs may translate into antecedents of psychological perceptions possessed by individuals during their time in agency employment.

10.3. Antecedents of Psychological Perceptions

A variety of studies outlined in the earlier chapters have viewed the effects of agency working as psychological variables, with three of the most prevalent variables including job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and job security. Before exploring the current study's findings in relation to these variables, the chapter will consider three of the major antecedents that were indicated by participants during their interviews.

10.3.1. The Vulnerability of the Agency Worker Contract

As a characteristic exclusive to the worker group, the agency worker contract was a recurring theme of previous literature and the current study. The most commonly cited consequence of this contract has been the greater degree of vulnerability individuals experience whilst employed under these circumstances, identifying it is a major antecedent to the psychological difficulties agency workers may encounter. This vulnerability was also described by many of the permanent workers in the sample, as they considered it to be a highly influential aspect of the agency working experience. During the time of our interview, Sam's company was experiencing a period of upheaval. He was asked whether he felt his status as a permanent employee was preferable to the agency worker status possessed by several of his colleagues:

Yeah, much much better. The agency staff have been told that their contract ends in a couple of weeks time, and yet they still don't know if they're staying or going. There are rumours that they are staying, and that a few of them are going, so I'm not really sure if they're keeping them on or not.

Due to his transition from an agency role into a permanent role, Sam was able to draw upon firsthand experience when asked whether he preferred his permanent status. His organisation had regularly hired agency workers over an initial period,

allowing them to assess their conduct prior to hiring them on a permanent basis. However, this method of recruitment also allowed the organisation to cancel the contracts of these workers at a time of uncertainty, without encountering the negative implications of firing a permanent worker. Agency workers like Baz were also aware of the lack of protection inherent in their agency worker roles:

There is an incentive to always be working hard because you have monthly figures, so if you're bad they tell you, and if that continues, then they will probably easily get someone else through an agency who will do it for you.

The quantitative nature of Baz's work allowed his third party employer to quickly assess and compare his efforts with other workers. However, the potential ease of his dismissal contrasted with that of permanent workers, increasing the pressure he felt in his role. During a follow-up interview, Baz recalled several days of severe snowfalls that made driving conditions extremely hazardous. He completed several dangerous car journeys to and from his organisation, despite the vast majority of permanent workers choosing to remain at home. The perceived ease of his replacement led Baz to take these risks, which undoubtedly placed his safety in jeopardy. For third party employers, the ease of replacement facilitated by the agency worker contract is an undoubted strength. As a manager for a company that utilised agency staff, Cynthia described how agency worker replacement could be achieved through brief and easy communication with the temporary employment agency:

I think most people who sign up for an agency recognise that there is no job security in being an agency worker... it's very easy to pick up the phone and say "no, that person is not working out, so could you send me someone else"... you have to cut your losses, and you have to sometimes make quicker decisions.

The actions described by Cynthia highlight the ease with which agency workers can be replaced. Temporary employment agencies may often possess a pool of available individuals, and this can represent a reserve of potential staff accessible to the third party employer. The quicker decisions described by Cynthia refer to the speed of replacement facilitated by the temporary employment agency, and this may translate into fewer chances for the individual agency worker to impress during their assignment. Whilst the loss of agency staff may be the result of poor performance or behaviour on the part of the individual, the negative financial pressures of the current recession may also influence the decision to lay off agency workers. In his role as a recruitment consultant, Jason outlined the negative impact of the current market on the employment of agency staff:

If they're temping out for a company, and that company goes bust, they're not going to get redundancy money, so once the contract is finished it's finished. I can never say it's ongoing because the market at the moment is not a safe market. I'd probably say on the permanent side as well, it's a tough market, but on the temps... any excuse to get rid of a temp financially is easily done.

The greater likelihood of financial difficulty encountered by many companies due to the current recession increases the attraction of employing agency staff, most notably due to the comparative ease of dismissal described by Jason. This creates an added financial incentive to the employment of agency staff, as companies are not contractually obligated to financially compensate agency workers for any loss of employment they experience. An understanding of the ease of dismissal was also apparent in interviews with the sample's permanent and agency workers, who shared the opinion that, if forced to downsize, the agency staff in the company would be the first to go.

10.3.2. Agency Workers would be first to go

Due to the timing of the interviews, the threat of redundancy was a recurring concern shared by the majority of participants. However, the belief that agency workers were the most susceptible to these lay-offs was unanimous. In his permanent role in a major insurance company, Dan C regularly worked alongside agency workers. His company had discussed the requirement of enforced redundancy with its employees, and the belief that the agency staff would be the first to go was undisputed:

Yeah, they would get rid of the agency staff first. I suppose that is good for me in one way. Even so, no-one is safe. If they need to get rid of two hundred and fifty people and only one hundred are temps, then we're just going to end up going.

In the example cited above, Dan and his permanent worker colleagues had been told by their employer that they would lay off all the agency workers before starting to whittle down the permanent workforce. Creating a buffer of agency staff can allow companies to protect the core permanent employees from the consequences of financial difficulty, and it was only down to the extreme number of redundancies required by the company that the level of protection resulting from the presence of agency employees in Dan's organisation was exceeded. In times of financial difficulty, the buffer of agency workers allows organisations to respond to unexpected bursts in demand without becoming tied into the contractual obligations manifested in the hiring of permanent staff. The use of agency staff in this manner

has been reported by several researchers, including Felstead and Gallie (2004), de Gilder (2003), and Golden and Appelbaum (1992), and may have negative repercussions for the individual. As a recruitment consultant, Polly described how this organisational benefit may manifest itself into volatile employment experiences for individual agency workers:

The nature of temporary work is unpredictable, and... as far as we're concerned, we have to outline to them that it's not guaranteed. If they're fantastic and they do a week's worth in two days, the client doesn't need them, then that's the client's fault... Unless it's guaranteed by the client as a six-week contract one hundred percent definite, but there's never one hundred percent guarantee... it's the nature of the beast.

In the excerpt above, Polly highlighted the lack of commitment demanded from the organisation, but goes on to argue that this is reflected by the freedom which agency workers possess in the pursuit of alternative employment whilst on assignment. Even though the third party employer is culpable of misjudgement regarding the assignment's duration, it is the agency workers who are financially penalised for the mistake, although the temporary employment agency will also experience a fall in revenue. I recorded an incident in my work diary that demonstrated the level of uncertainty inherent in my time spent in agency work:

I began a six week assignment which consisted of marking exam papers, but two weeks in, the eruption of the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull temporarily interrupted the delivery of unmarked exam papers. Our initial speed in marking exam papers meant that we ran out of unmarked papers in the morning, and after being asked to wait until midday, we were sent home until the following day, resulting in the loss of five hours pay. As a result of this experience, we kept a careful watch on the number of papers we marked to ensure that our pay remained forthcoming for the remainder of the assignment (Researcher's diary)

This episode undoubtedly created an increased sense of insecurity for my team and me which encompassed the remaining weeks of our assignment. We learnt at the end of our assignment that our level of performance had exceeded that of other teams over previous years. The perception we shared regarding the actions of our third party employer was one of injustice to what we saw as a financial punishment for efficiency and hard work.

10.3.3. The Increased Security of Agency Working

The issue of job security was a major theme throughout each interview of the current research. For permanent workers, the loss of employment typically represents a highly problematic development in their careers. However, the

increased threat undoubtedly present within agency work often increases the individual's awareness and degree of preparation, ensuring that they cope far better with a loss of employment. During his agency working assignment, Ivan understood the greater risk inherent within his role:

I'd be the first to go, obviously because I don't have any employment rights. I would say in general that agency workers will only be in a role for the short term so they'd obviously be the first to go if the work subsides. That said, the agency might find you more work, and in a permanent role you might be made redundant in any case.

As with other agency workers of the sample, Ivan expected to be the first recipient of redundancy if his third party employer encountered financial difficulties. He based this belief upon his rights as an employee, which he considered to be significantly lower than his permanent counterparts. However, the redundancy he had experienced as a permanent worker had served to increase his awareness of the threat. He felt his temporary employment agency would provide an alternative assignment as soon as possible, and that this represented a support network that permanent counterparts suffering the same fate would lack. For several of the study's agency worker participants, the presence of their agency instilled a sense of employment security. During his interview, Mike recalled his high levels of confidence which resulted from his role with the agency:

At the time there was an abundance of work going on. There were loads of telesales going on, plus all the random stuff that I did. It might have only been a day or two days long, so I think they'd have always been able to find me something.

For Mike, the presence of his temporary employment agency instilled peace of mind regarding his employment needs. The revenue of employment agencies relies upon its success in providing a platform into employment for individuals, which can translate into a form of support that permanent workers lack. The presence of the temporary employment agency represented just one of several distinctions between agency and permanent employment, and these distinctions can generate a variety of psychological perceptions.

10.4. The Job Satisfaction of Agency Workers

So far, the chapter has highlighted the major antecedents which shape the views that agency workers possess towards their assignments. The agency worker contract can have a major impact upon the psychological perceptions that individuals possess, whilst interactions with third party employers and their pre-

existing permanent staff can also strongly influence these feelings. The chapter will now continue by exploring the effect of these antecedents on several major psychological variables, beginning with job satisfaction.

10.4.1. Positive Job Satisfaction in Agency Working

Reported levels of job satisfaction varied throughout the sample of agency workers. This degree of variation became the subject for Nick P, who was asked to assess the levels of agency worker satisfaction that he observed as a recruitment consultant:

It's about sixty-forty. Sixty are really satisfied, [but] because they are not their ideal roles they're not one hundred percent satisfied... If you probably really got down to the nitty gritty with them, it would probably be, yes they are satisfied, but they feel they could always be something better. The pay could be better, the management could be better, there could be more incentives. But if you get it in a nutshell, probably they would be satisfied, but if you looked at the whole entire employment market, how many people are actually one hundred percent satisfied?

By drawing a comparison with the permanent labour force, Nick suggested that the varying levels of satisfaction agency workers experienced were similar to those of permanent workers. However, Nick also argued that agency employment often represented a second choice to permanent work, and that this was reflected in the varying levels of satisfaction that he witnessed in his role. The motives and future employment possessed by individuals prior to the commencement of their assignment can prove significant to the levels of satisfaction they attribute to their roles. When asked whether he was happy in his agency working role, Dan N replied:

I actually am happy, even though it is a bit repetitive we can listen to music, we can pace ourselves, it's not too rigidly enforced. I wouldn't want to do it for a living full time.

Dan's agency assignment was scheduled to last for approximately two months, and despite the mundane nature of the tasks, the presence of an end date limited the effect that the assignment's negative elements had upon Dan's job satisfaction. If Dan had possessed an equivalent permanent role, his feelings of job satisfaction may have been far more negative, as he would have found himself in an undesirable role over a long-term period of time.

Shorter tenures may also increase variety, as agency workers encountering multiple assignments are more likely to participate in different tasks. Under these

circumstances, the motives of individuals become important, as a desire to experience a variety of jobs may underlie the pursuit of agency employment. When compared with permanent counterparts who possess a strong investment in their company, the reduced job investment that often occurs in agency assignments may limit the negative effects of job-related stress. When Tom was asked whether he had noticed a difference in the levels of satisfaction displayed by agency workers like him in relation to their permanent counterparts, he replied:

Yeah, definitely. The permanent workers always looked more stressed, and presumably that was because temporary workers knew there was a limit to the amount of time they were going to be there. They had a date for the end of the contract, and there was general knowledge that there was less responsibility involved with being a temp. That was generally the case with all the assignments I've had.

For Tom, the reduced tenure and limited contract duration restricted the responsibilities of agency workers, limiting their exposure to stress as a result. Parker, Griffin, Sprigg, and Wall (2002) reported a similar effect in their research, arguing that an individual's position on the periphery of a workforce may protect them from some of the more stressful elements of the job that core permanent workers encounter. Lower satisfaction can result from increased stress, yet this effect is more likely to occur with longer-term permanent employees. For others, longer tenure can lead to greater feelings of job satisfaction, often through increased integration into the third party employer. Initial permanent worker perceptions of their agency worker counterparts may be negatively influenced by the belief that the latter possess reduced levels of commitment towards the company, and may leave after a short period of time as a result. During our interview, Baz reported the initial permanent worker reaction to his recruitment, and described how this changed over time:

To start with, it wasn't great, because a lot of the full-time people who were permanent didn't really want to get to know you, because they thought you were a temp, so you wouldn't be there that long so they weren't going to bother... But now I've got to know everyone a bit better, I don't mind the job ... I think they do consider me a member of the team even though I'm only a temp. I mean some people didn't even realise I was a temp until recently.

The surprise exhibited by permanent members of Baz's organisation upon finding out he was an agency worker resulted from the reduced tenure they had frequently witnessed during their company's utilisation of agency staff. The greater integration into the workforce that accompanied Baz's increased tenure was central in the formulation of satisfaction he felt in the job. However, this also demonstrates the

difficulty that many agency workers can initially encounter in their assignments. Negative reaction from pre-existing employees represents one of several issues that may result in lower levels of job satisfaction for agency workers, which may include low pay, poor working conditions, bad treatment, or job insecurity.

10.4.2. Lower Satisfaction as an Agency Worker

So far, the chapter has highlighted the variety of characteristics associated with the experiences of agency workers on assignment, and how these can represent antecedents to psychological perceptions associated with the role. The influences of the agency working contract, permanent worker encounters, and ease of dismissal may have negative repercussions upon the perceptions of job satisfaction possessed by agency workers. Low pay and reduced freedom also characterised many of the employment experiences of the sample's agency workers, whilst poor treatment was also an issue. Jamie reported similar problems after comparing two previous agency working assignments:

When I look at it now, I really wasn't treated well. The pay was absolutely horrendous. I think you learn from that, so it definitely helped me choose the right agency to go to later on when I did progress onto the airport, and then into full-time employment. It's definitely more steady, and you know you're going to be there one day and you could be gone the next.

The belief that agency work represents a less desirable long-term career path can also reduce job satisfaction. In her management role, Cynthia had witnessed a regular influx of agency workers into her organisation. When asked during her interview whether the agency workers that she regularly encountered were satisfied with their jobs, Cynthia replied:

No. Let's face it; if you're in an agency, you're looking for your real career. There's a few that come in and they say "ok, this is as good or better". If we're lucky, [they'll say] "I've been working before, so I can do this. Train me up and I'll stick around". We have hired a number of agency workers who've put their names forward and said "this is something I'd like to do", so we have hired them. But they are the minority, not the majority.

Whilst pay and treatment were highlighted as potential causes of low satisfaction, Cynthia considered the frustration that many of her agency workers attributed towards their employment status as a major contributor to these reduced levels. The perception that agency work represents an undesirable temporary alternative to permanent employment has been highlighted in previous research (e.g. Hesselink & Vuuren, 1999; Rogers, 2000), and the lack of security may well limit its appeal as a

long-term career choice. Agency work was rarely regarded as a positive long-term career choice, as the lack of security inherent in the contract can make any long-term arrangements highly unstable. The feelings of anxiety which result from the contract itself may also create feelings of anxiety within the individual regarding their future employment, and these were often attributed to the reduced job satisfaction witnessed in agency worker groups. As a permanent worker, Sam understood the fears that his agency worker colleagues were experiencing at the time of our interview:

They're not actually sure if they're being taken on or not... I guess they're unsure, so that makes them a bit worried about what they're going to do if they don't get a contract. I suppose that's down to their satisfaction. If they know they've got a job in the next couple of weeks then they'll be happier, I would have thought.

Sam had begun his time at the organisation as an agency worker, and was empathic towards the uncertain futures of his agency worker colleagues. Agency worker utilisation regularly represented the initial stages of the company's permanent recruitment process, yet the financial difficulties occurring at the time of the interview reduced the likelihood of these transitions taking place. Consequently, the agency workers were kept in a form of employment limbo, and Sam identified this as an antecedent to negative feelings of job satisfaction. In his role as a recruitment consultant, Jason described the importance of guaranteed employment in relation to the happiness of individuals:

Agency workers are satisfied if it's ongoing work... I can't guarantee them work. I phone them up one day [and say] "there's work for one day this week, nothing for the next couple of weeks". They always want ongoing work... When I can't guarantee them work, they're never going to be always happy, so it's fifty-fifty to be honest.

The difficulty Jason experienced in placing agency workers into long-term and on-going assignments resulted in a great deal of variation in job satisfaction. Longer-term assignments may be relatively unstable when compared with permanent contracts, yet Jason reported the difficulty in securing these very assignments in the first place. The sporadic provision of short-term work translates into a varied experience of employment with an unpredictable wage, and will be viewed by many agency workers as highly strenuous, uncertain, and unrewarding. Such characteristics are likely to generate reduced satisfaction, and may have repercussions upon the formation of feelings of organisational commitment.

10.5. The Organisational Commitment of Agency Workers

The employment arrangements present in the majority of agency working assignments can have a strong influence upon the formulation of organisational commitment in individuals. Shorter tenures, contrasting treatment, and the links to two employers reduce the likelihood of greater feelings of organisational commitment from the individual agency worker.

10.5.1. Harder to gain Commitment

The variation in tenure and the sporadic distribution of assignments were regarded by many agency workers as a barrier to the formulation of commitment towards their third party employers. As an agency worker, Yomi became a popular addition to his predominantly permanent team. However during our interview, he highlighted the part-time nature of his assignment as problematic to feeling part of the organisation:

I think I feel part of the team, but a part of the organisation? I think that is a different question... I think, with the fact that I'm part time as well, it makes it difficult to say "I'm part of the organisation", [and] I think the fact that I'm also new, I'm still finding my way around.

Yomi was pleased with what his assignment entailed, as he enjoyed his role and the interaction with his colleagues. However, his work sorting packages in a factory was limited to one regular night a week. The agency would call upon him to fill additional shifts with the company, but these calls would come at short notice, and varied considerably in length, time, and day of the week. The organisation was a large one, and employed many permanent and agency workers, yet permanent workers possessed regular shifts, ensuring that these shifts encompassed work teams of similar personnel. Agency workers were used to plug the gaps, which created the sporadic shift patterns and lack of integration that Yomi objected to.

The camaraderie experienced by permanent colleagues may instil greater levels of organisational commitment for individuals, yet the working conditions that facilitate these regular and recurring interactions are more likely to be absent from the assignments of agency workers. During his interview, Tom recalled one of his favoured assignments, where consistent working hours with a small workforce positively impacted upon his experience:

I worked for a small company. It was a lettings agency, and it just started up in [name of city]. I did feel I was part of this little tiny group of people, including myself. As a temp, it really felt that you were working together and doing good for the little company.

The assignment Tom recalled varies considerably to that described by Yomi, as do the feelings of commitment he attributed to this time. Agency workers may be considered a 'reserve' workforce for companies to draw upon when needed, although these employment practices may be viewed poorly by the agency workers who are called upon. Tom's agency assignment closely resembled the roles of the permanent employees he worked alongside, and this sense of equality undoubtedly contributed to his commitment. The familiarity inherent in longer term and consistent assignments may also prove beneficial, as Dan N reported when asked whether he felt committed towards his organisation:

I do here, yeah. I've been here for over a year with [TPE] off and on, so you do you feel a commitment to do the job properly. You sort of get to know a few people in the organisation too.

As the experiences of Dan and Tom demonstrate, improved integration and increased tenure that are more prevalent in permanent working arrangements can also prove highly beneficial for agency workers. The existence of these aspects can help to form increased commitment that the agency workers of the sample experience towards their employer and its workers. However, agency worker assignments are far more likely to exclude these benefits, and a detrimental impact on commitment may result.

10.5.2. Agency Workers are Less Committed

The opinion that agency workers lacked commitment towards the organisation was expressed frequently by the permanent workers of the sample. This belief soon became apparent during one of my agency assignments, which contained repetitive and physically demanding tasks:

At the end of my shift, the amount of remaining work led the manager to ask workers to stay late and help. The agency staff working with me left at the allotted time despite this request, as they were not obligated to work beyond the hours agreed with the agency. I decided to stay a little longer to help finish the job I had begun, causing one of the departing agency workers to remark that I was 'mad'. My decision was met with considerable surprise and confusion from the permanent members of staff, who by then knew I was agency worker (Researcher's diary).

The reaction towards my behaviour suggested that the permanent workers were surprised by my decision to stay on, as this differed from the typical actions of agency staff. Unlike my permanent colleagues, the tenure of my agency contract prevented me from claiming overtime on the extra work. I wanted to finish the job I

had started, but the permanent workers were clearly unaccustomed to witnessing this level of commitment in their agency counterparts. My actions may well have contradicted a stereotype that Henson (1996) also referred to, when claiming that permanent staff considered their agency colleagues as less committed, less qualified, and less principled workers. A negative perception of agency staff was also reported by other permanent participants, coinciding with the finding of Van Dyne and Ang (1998) that such workers were less likely to engage in organisational citizenship behaviours. When asked whether he felt the agency workers that his company utilised demonstrated similar levels of commitment when compared with permanent staff like him, Ben replied:

I'm not sure to be honest. I guess not as much with agency staff. Easy come easy go.

A similar view was expressed by Nick M, who regularly managed the agency workers that his company hired:

Probably not nearly as much. They probably feel slightly outside of the envelope of the company.

The doubt described by Ben and Nick represents the permanent worker perspective of infrequent and sporadic agency worker utilisation. Despite possessing different roles in their companies, they had both witnessed large numbers of agency staff enter their company for short periods of time, often to set up, run, or disassemble the large service events held by the company. The workforce of agency workers in each company frequently changed in personnel, and these staff typically worked fewer hours in shifts that rarely merged with those of permanent workers.

Negative perceptions of agency worker commitment like those voiced by Ben and Nick may often result from the recruitment practices of the third party employer, and therefore may not be an accurate reflection of the feelings of commitment that the agency workers possess. The working opportunities provided by the third party employer may prevent the development of the agency worker's organisational commitment, yet the individual's intentions may also prove influential. When asked what motivated his pursuit of agency employment, Mike replied:

At the time I would have looked for whatever better jobs were going... companies offering better salary or better hourly wage... I was really just chasing money. I didn't really care what job I was doing, I just needed to earn a day's worth of work almost every day so I could pay my way. So, yeah, money was the only real incentive for me.

In contrast to many permanent workers, the desire to establish a strong relationship with the employer was not considered by Mike to be a priority. By highlighting money as the only real incentive for his actions, Mike moved from one assignment to the next, rarely staying for more than a few days. The absence of responsibilities resulting from shorter tenures led Mike to report increased freedom in his agency status, yet these feelings were often offset by reduced levels of commitment towards his client companies.

10.6. The Support of the Third Party Employer

In the previous chapter, the role played by the temporary employment agency in providing support for the individual was explored, yet the agency only represents one of the organisations that employ agency workers. The vast majority of an individual's interactions will be with the third party employer, as the influence and support agencies exert upon its agency workers lessens considerably once they have been placed onto an assignment. Perhaps the most significant form of support agency workers receive from their third party employers is a potentially useful degree of feedback based upon their efforts. The provision of feedback can prove highly beneficial for the individual agency worker, yet as a recruitment consultant, Polly also highlighted the importance of this information for temporary employment agencies:

We speak to most of our clients on a daily basis, so we get feedback constantly to improve or not. We rely a lot on candidate and client feedback definitely, definitely.

For Polly, the provision of feedback from her client organisations helped her to maintain an effective level of service and meet the demands that companies placed upon her. However, discussions with the study's participants suggested that the level of feedback supplied by third party employers varied significantly, and was completely absent in many cases. One such example was provided by Cathy, whose management role in the administration department of her organisation ensured that she regularly hired agency staff:

If they're not up to scratch, I leave it up to my guys out there. If they've got a problem they'll tell me, but if there are no problems, we don't tend to feed back normally.

The actions of Cathy appeared to be common-place, and demonstrate the reasons for the lack of feedback received by individual agency workers. Cathy saw no reason to provide feedback on the positive performance of her agency staff, and

only considered contacting the agency if their performance was below standard. During discussions with the recruitment consultants of the sample, the lack of feedback relating to positive performance was considered a frustrating, yet commonly occurring characteristic of agency worker provision. As one such recruitment consultant, Simon voiced this frustration:

They're a lot of people who are quite happy with their candidates, but don't necessarily convey that. We send out temp of the month email requests... you get a lot of quite nice emails back for certain candidates, probably half a dozen every time you run it, which is half a dozen of the best part of a hundred, in terms of positive feedback.

The feedback occasionally received by Simon provided a boost to the morale of the individual, and validated the agency's efforts in effectively matching the worker with the company. However, the responses received by Simon were often highly disproportionate to the numbers of agency workers on assignment, suggesting a lack of interest on the part of the third party employer. The ease with which agency workers can be replaced suggests that an individual's ongoing employment is a clear sign of the organisation's satisfaction with their performance, yet this contrasts with the lack of feedback obtained by recruitment consultants like Simon.

Companies may believe that agency workers are less committed to their jobs, and would therefore not benefit from feedback to the same extent as permanent employees, yet this opinion was considered inaccurate by Simon:

I think it's nice to be able to pass [feedback] onto candidates as well, because they say sometimes people in roles aren't as involved in things they've done previously. I think it can be a bit of a boost. At least [they can say] "I'm being appreciated. I mean the money I earn may not be as much as I earned previously and the job may not be as interesting, but I'm being appreciated for what I'm doing". I think that would be beneficial.

For third party employers, the priority of providing feedback to agency staff may be considerably lower in relation to their permanent staff. However, Simon argued that agency workers benefitted from feedback to an extent that employing companies may not appreciate. The current study has highlighted several disparities in treatment between agency workers and their permanent counterparts, and the provision of feedback is one area where differences typically exist. The current chapter will continue by exploring how permanent workers' reaction to the agency worker utilisation of their companies may influence the perceptions of agency workers.

10.7. Agency Workers and Permanent Staff

The chapter has explored the experiences of agency workers on assignment, but the third party employer's decision to use agency staff can represent a variety of repercussions for the pre-existing permanent members of the workforce (Pearce, 1993). Permanent workers in the sample reported a partially negative reaction to their company's decision to utilise agency workers, although positive consequences were also attributed to this development. The chapter will continue by exploring the main influences upon the reaction and worker-group relationships resulting from agency worker utilisation.

10.7.1. The Isolation and Segregation of Agency Workers

During discussions with permanent workers, several negative influences that may damage the relationships formed between agency workers and permanent workers were identified. Isolation was reported as a concern by several participants. This isolation may well have been self-imposed by individuals who were only interested in socialising with peers in their own work group, whilst task distribution and shift patterns were also culpable. In his role as a recruitment consultant, Jason received feedback from agency workers that indicated the problems they faced from the third party employer's permanent workforce:

I've heard about people being isolated. If they're in a basic warehouse role, [permanent workers think] "it's us against them. They're just here as warehouse. They're just here to pick and pack. Once the jobs done they go home, they don't get the benefits we get". It's going to happen, because obviously a lot of temps wear different uniform, like [TEA] high visibility vests, so there's always going to be that alienation that "you're a temp, I'm employed here, so I've got more benefits than you have".

Even a basic difference in uniform can distinguish agency workers from their permanent worker colleagues, and in Jason's experience, minor variations such as these instigated occasional instances of mild discrimination. As an agency worker, Jamie described how the service his temporary employment agency provided to multiple organisations impacted upon the permanent worker perceptions of agency staff utilisation:

[My agency] was all over the place. The guys in the agencies kept themselves to themselves, and then when you were in that function where you might be working with employees of the company, they kept themselves to themselves. It wasn't really a very comfortable environment to be in... Because you were constantly on the move to so many places, you didn't really feel you could socialise with the workers at that current place.

Jamie's temporary employment agency specialised in silver service, outsourcing their workers to venues that were holding large functions. The companies that used Jamie's agency would experience a short-lived influx of workers, and the pre-existing permanent staff would not always approve of this employment practice. As a result, the context in which Jamie's agency working experiences took place made building relationships with permanent staff very difficult, as the relationships that were forged were almost exclusively with individuals from his own worker group. These clear divisions created a sense of isolation that prevented the agency workers from integrating into the third party employer organisation. In his middle management role with a company that utilised agency workers, Nick M noted the issue of segregation, and how it influenced his permanent colleagues' opinion on agency labour:

There are definitely divisions drawn, even on finish and start times... There's always a significant question when you ask someone when they first get there [which is] "are you permanent, or are you agency?"... They tend to stay with each other in their group of friends, and the permanent staff does interact, and are friends with them, but there's definitely distinguished groups between them.

In Nick's example, varying shift patterns ensured that differences in the start times, finish times, and break times of the workforce were based upon the workers' status. This led to distinct socialising patterns that limited interaction between the alternate worker groups. Segregation between agency and permanent worker groups was frequently recorded, yet reasons for its existence varied. During a warehouse-based assignment, I witnessed how the disparity in skill could also result in segregation:

Work in the warehouse could be broadly divided into manual labour and skilled labour, yet the skilled labour required licences and training that only the permanent workers possessed. Whilst agency workers were left to manually sort packages, the permanent workers would process the workload, operate the machinery, and use forklift trucks. The segregation created by the differing tasks extended to work breaks, as the permanent workers effectively ignored the presence of the three agency workers, despite the small canteen area.

Whilst unavoidable in the workplace, the variation in skill and training present in the permanent and agency staff created a clear distinction between the worker groups that unsurprisingly persisted during breaks, making relationships hard to build. The descriptions above demonstrate several ways in which agency staff can be identified as distinct from the main workforce. Uniform, shift patterns, multiple working environments, and variation in levels of skill can all generate isolation and

segregation from the permanent workforce, and this will in turn negatively influence the relationships that these worker groups possess. Whilst some instances of segregation are unavoidable, other examples result from potentially negative employment practices of the temporary employment agency or the third party employer, yet individual workers typically suffer the consequences. Similar concerns were voiced by Henson (1996), who noted that high turnover rates, constantly fluctuating schedules, and shifting work sites may atomize and isolate the individual.

10.7.2. The Influx of Agency Workers

The motive to quickly boost a workforce's numbers undoubtedly represents an obvious benefit for companies that utilise temporary employment agencies, yet the sudden and short-lived influx of workers may have several negative consequences for the pre-existing permanent workforce. During an agency worker assignment, I noted behaviour that indicated how a permanent colleague distinguished me from his counterparts:

At the start of my assignment, I was given an ID badge to be worn at all times that had the word 'TEMP' in large capital letters. During one shift, a permanent worker who was trying to get my attention continually shouted a different name. When I informed him of his mistake, he apologised, claiming that at least two other previous agency workers had shared the name he had been shouting.

In this instance, I was identified by my contractual status, and regarded simply as 'just another temp'. The high turnover rate of agency staff in the company typically limited interactions, and fostered the permanent workers' opinion that agency workers would soon leave, which reduced the need to learn names and make acquaintances. The number of assignments I worked in ensured that I experienced a variety of different companies, workplace settings, task demands, and co-worker relationships, yet one recurring factor was the requirement to highlight my contractual status to my co-workers. This was fulfilled by the constant demand to wear ID badges that clarified my position, with terms like 'TEMP' and 'AGENCY' written in large capital letters. The significance of these labels extended beyond simple identification, as they also served to limit the entitlements of those who wore them. In one assignment, possessing an 'agency' pass meant I required permission from a permanent counterpart in order to access the toilet or canteen. Another assignment was similarly problematic, as the agency workers onsite needed the ID card of their team leader to enter and exit the room in which they worked. When combined with a disparity in workplace privileges, the requirement of agency

workers to display their employment status at all times during their assignments contributed to a perceived division of status between agency staff and their permanent counterparts, regardless of age, skill, experience, ability, intentions, or value to the company. Another consequence of any sudden, but temporary, increase in worker numbers is the difficulty experienced by permanent staff when working with new people. As a permanent worker, Nick M witnessed differences in opinion between his colleagues and their agency worker counterparts:

I've seen a couple of my colleagues get quite offended when agency workers question what people are doing. It almost says the company is not very good, because they are seen as outsiders coming into their company and saying "why aren't you doing it like this? This is rubbish. Your company is rubbish". I think some of my colleagues have seen that as an insult, which means that they tend to say "right, that's enough. This is what I want you to do, that's it" and leave it at that.

Recognising the skills and abilities of a work colleague can take time, yet for companies like Nick's, short-term agency worker utilisation will limit this understanding. As research by Torka and Schyns (2007) has indicated, the additional value of agency worker experience may contribute to continuous improvement, yet such staff may be denied the opportunity to demonstrate their potential worth. Differences of opinion may be resolved by experience, yet in the instance Nick recollected, the views of agency workers were clearly perceived as inferior to the permanent workers', regardless of experience.

Rapidly increasing workforce size is a key motive for organisations utilising agency workers, yet reducing the financial obligations can also be important. Replacing permanent staff with agency workers represents one way of achieving this, yet can be viewed critically by the pre-existing staff. As a permanent employee, Sam witnessed many redundancies in his company, yet found agency workers filling these vacancies almost immediately:

I think it was advertised in the newspaper a couple of weeks later on after people had gone... some of the people that left were your good friends that got replaced. You've got people out of work and other people taking their jobs pretty much straight away.

Sam's company worked in a seasonal industry, and the fewer obligations encompassed by the agency worker contract allowed staffing costs to be cut during quieter periods. The actions of Sam's employer represented logical financial sense, yet provoked strong criticism from the remaining permanent employees. The speed of replacement ensured that the agency workers who were hired to fill the vacancies

were dropped into a potentially toxic environment of company upheaval for which staff may have held them partially responsible. Employment practices like these can generate negative reaction to the incorporation of agency workers, even when the company has no plans to reduce its permanent workforce. As an agency worker, James encountered suspicion from his permanent colleagues during his assignment, even though no redundancies were implemented by the organisation:

I think some permanent members of staff tend to feel threatened by agency staff, because they think they're coming in to take their jobs ... they don't feel agency staff are trained well enough to do the job that they do. They don't have contempt for them, [but] they are quizzical about them.

Despite representing a consequence of a poorly informed workforce, the scepticism that James encountered during his assignment made his employment more difficult and less enjoyable. Findings from several studies have indicated the potential damage to permanent worker perceptions of job security resulting from agency worker utilisation, including those of Biggs, Senior, and Swailes (2002), and Pearce (1993). Recruitment practices which lack transparency are a product of the third party employer's actions, yet agency workers like James bear the brunt of the ill-feeling and misgivings displayed by the permanent workforce.

10.7.3. The Increased Security Agency Workers can provide Permanent Workers

In chapter eight, the organisational desire to increase protection from permanent worker loss was identified as a possible motive of agency worker utilisation. Whilst permanent worker reactions to increased numbers of agency staff were initially negative, several participants identified the increased protection that these workers could bring to the pre-existing workforce. After keeping his job during a time of company upheaval that resulted in many of his colleagues losing their employment, Sam recognised the sudden influx of agency staff as potentially beneficial to his own security:

I think if they do get rid of people, it will be the agency staff. I think the permanent staff are pretty safe within their jobs... It's usually done by how long you've been there, and if they wanted to get rid of me they would have to pay me redundancy money. With temporary staff, they wouldn't do that.

Despite initially upsetting many of the remaining workers, the company's decision to reduce the number of permanent employees whilst incorporating a greater number of agency staff into the workforce eventually instilled a greater degree of security for permanent workers like Sam. The desire to lower the costs associated with a

fluctuating workforce size based upon demand was likely to be the primary motive for Sam's company, yet securing the positions of the reduced number of core permanent workers also represented a benefit. Agency workers pay a potentially high price for this increased security, yet for pre-existing employees like Dan C, permanent worker security represented a priority:

I think they've got the balance just about right. Like I said before, if they needed to get rid of people, they need to get rid of the agency staff first, so if anything it's a good thing. I think it makes you feel a bit more secure.

Like Sam, Dan viewed his company's employment of agency workers in relation to his own security, suggesting that it added greater protection from the difficulties his company was facing at the time of the interview. Dan argued that an all-permanent workforce would lack this protection, and increase doubts about his future employment with the company. When viewing their company in terms of a basic hierarchy, the permanent workers of the sample placed themselves above agency staff without fail. When combined with this perception, the reduced security inherent in the agency working contract cemented the permanent workers' belief that agency staff would be asked to leave first by the company. Several researchers have reported this perception in permanent workers. In their study into the effects of agency worker employment practice, Bishop, Goldsby, and Neck (2001) argued that using agency staff as a 'buffer' to economy fluctuation could lead to increased levels of organisational commitment in pre-existing permanent employees. The superior hierarchical position that permanent staff regarded themselves as occupying also influenced the working dynamics between the two groups. When asked how the permanent workers like him interacted with the agency staff, Ben replied:

I think they felt more in control, because they could order the temps around... The people who'd been working there before knew what they were doing, so they quite enjoyed telling them what to do.

In Ben's company, the consensus of permanent worker opinion placed the agency workers at the bottom rung of the ladder, and treated them accordingly. Agency workers were often considered a secondary workforce who possessed little organisation-specific knowledge and reduced autonomy. This led the pre-existing workforce to regard themselves as a core element of the company, which in turn increased the levels of control and security that they attributed to their positions within the organisation.

10.8. Summary

The findings reported in the current chapter contain some strong associations with previous research. The simplistic nature of the tasks performed by the study's agency workers was often a product of their lack of organisation-specific knowledge, yet this division in task complexity may prove problematic for both parties. Pearce (1993) reported that shifting difficult assignments onto permanent staff could reduce their trust in the organisation, whilst the current study indicated that the simplistic tasks demanded from agency workers often limited their ability to impress the employer and reduced the likelihood of securing a permanent transition into the company. The lack of autonomy allocated to agency workers was often considered a frustration, yet Henson (1996) argued that levels of autonomy were dependent upon tenure, and not necessarily status. Findings supported this argument, as the agency workers in the current study who experienced longer assignments reported increased control, integration, and satisfaction. However, the low tenures that often characterise agency worker employment place these individuals in the minority.

Using agency workers to create a periphery of employees around a core workforce of permanent staff ties in strongly with Harvey's (1990) theory of 'flexible accumulation' outlined in chapter four. In line with previous research that highlighted the negative impact that these employment practices can instil (e.g. Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Hesselink & Vuuren, 1999), the experience of uncertainty was reported by several of the study's agency workers. However, individuals reported lower levels of role-related stress as a result, which correlated with the advantages that Parker et al (2002) associated with employment as a peripheral worker. The separation described by the participants also indicated a willingness to experience other forms of employment, as individuals often felt less constrained by their responsibilities. Whilst beneficial, these advantages may be offset by reduced contractual protection (Lavin, 2005), vulnerability to market fluctuation (de Gilder, 2003), and potential wage disparity (Forde & Slater, 2006).

The absence of feedback during and post-assignment was also found to occur frequently. As a result of their status, and in line with the findings of Rogers (2000) and Henson (1996), agency workers lacked the possibility of being rewarded for high performance in the same manner as their permanent counterparts in relation to pay increases, bonuses, or promotion. As a result, the provision of feedback often represented the main outlet for demonstrating gratitude regarding the efforts of agency workers. Despite the ease and likely benefits of feedback indicated by

Newton (1996), the findings of the current study were in line with those of Druker and Stanworth (2004), who argued that agency workers rarely, if ever, received an evaluation of their performance from the third party employer.

In line with Kalleberg's (2000) finding that temporary employment agencies often represented an extension of the client firms' human resources departments, a rapid short-term influx of agency workers characterised several of the experiences recorded in the research, particularly for companies holding infrequent large-scale events. Kuvaas and Dysvik (2007) warned against this method of worker utilisation, as short-term cost-driven human resource strategy can negatively affect the social climate of the organisation and the motivation and commitment of its permanent staff. Whilst using agency staff in this manner may prove unavoidable, the current study strongly supported this conclusion, as a poor context for relationship formulation between worker groups clearly became evident.

The organisational benefit of any additional experience brought in by agency staff reported in research by Torka and Schyns (2007) was not supported, as these workers rarely possessed autonomy or input into the working practices of permanent workers, and the agency workers referred to by participants in the study often represented comparatively lower-skilled individuals recruited to complete mundane and simplistic tasks. The limited organisation-specific knowledge regarding working methods and culture that these individuals typically possessed also hampered these exchanges, and this problem was also reported by Hesselink and Vuuren (1999).

Previous research has argued that the inclusion of agency staff can instil feelings of insecurity in the pre-existing permanent workers (e.g. Pearce, 1993), yet this effect was not reported by the permanent workers in the sample. The perceived motive of the organisation's use of agency staff was identified as highly influential to the reactions of permanent workers, as participants who viewed the agency workers in their company as a buffer to the threat of redundancy often voiced stronger feelings of security as a result. This finding may be attributed to the inflated threat of redundancy stemming from the timing of the study, as the interviews took place during a global recession. This finding draws strong parallels with research by Bishop, Goldsby, and Neck (2001), as they reported that permanent workers who perceived their organisation's use of agency workers as a shield to market fluctuation reported higher commitment.

The use of agency workers as a 'buffer' to external market fluctuations represents just one of several examples of treatment facilitated by the lack of contractual obligations inherent in the agency worker contract. In recent years, this disparity in treatment has become the focus of proposed legislative changes in the European Union, and the impending implementation of the 'Agency Workers Directive' represents the outcome of this focus. The following chapter will explore the implications of this imminent change in law by gauging the reactions of agency workers and other interested parties.

11. The Agency Workers Directive

11.1. Introduction

Over recent years, talks over adopting the Agency Workers Directive into UK employment law had stalled. However, this changed in December 2008, when the European parliament formally agreed upon the proposed Directive, and planned to enforce the Directive within the following three years. At the time of writing, the 1st October 2011 had been identified as the date in which this implementation would take place in the UK (BIS, 2010). As a result, the timing of the current thesis prevented a post-adoption assessment of the Directive, although the research was able to explore reaction to the Directive and its agreed adoption from a variety of perspectives.

The Directive targets several disparities in treatment existing between agency workers and comparable permanent workers relating to pay, treatment, and employee rights. As discussed earlier in the thesis, the Directive has met with mixed response from a variety of perspectives associated with the employment of agency staff. The Directive was regarded by representatives of temporary employment agencies in the sample as a significant development for the agency employment industry, therefore identifying it as a major theme in the current research. The views of recruitment consultants, agency workers, and other interested parties will now be explored in greater detail throughout the current chapter.

11.2. A Positive Change for Agency Workers

The adoption of the Agency Workers Directive has met with mixed response from a variety of concerned parties, as whilst several changes relating to pay, treatment, and employment rights have been outlined, these changes have been coupled with an uncertainty over how the legislation will impact upon businesses throughout the UK. The greatest level of understanding was undoubtedly demonstrated by the recruitment consultants in the sample, and their reaction to the Directive's adoption was almost universally positive. When asked how the Directive would benefit the industry, Jenny replied:

It'll get the cowboys out of the industry... and that will be a great thing for everybody.

Despite residing in the same industry, the working practices of temporary employment agencies can vary considerably. In her role as a recruitment

consultant, Jenny had regularly encountered individuals who had experienced poor treatment as agency workers, most notably in relation to pay, but also in the efforts of the temporary employment agency to secure further rights from their client companies on behalf of the agency worker. When assessing the changes outlined in the Directive, Jenny identified agencies with suspect procedures as 'cowboys', and felt that the Directive would penalise the actions of these agencies to a far greater extent than her own company. The belief that the Directive would bring about positive change was also identified by Julie, who felt it would help agency workers, as well as the temporary employment agency she was based in:

There has always been a necessity to have temporary workers within businesses... sometimes it's a necessary evil, but with all these new procedures, it's not until you're actually working through you can see what effect it can have. Initially, I think it's going to be a positive change for us and our temporary workers.

When asked how the Directive would impact upon her temporary employment agency, Julie identified the Directive as largely beneficial for agencies and agency workers, but an element of uncertainty existed as to exactly how the Directive would work, and how it would be enforced. The sample of recruitment consultants supported the principles that the Directive stood for, but voiced doubt about how well these changes would integrate into, and be upheld by, UK employment law. As an agency worker prior to the adoption of the Directive, Dan N was asked whether the changes would mean the role of an agency worker would be more attractive:

I think it would be. We'll just see how hard it will be to find work. They might just use their own company temps, so [name of current TPE] might, because they've got their own temps as well. They might just shift a few things, if they've got to pay more.

Since emigrating from New Zealand two years prior to our interview, Dan had worked in several agency working assignments in the UK, and regarded the changes outlined in the Directive as a positive step for longer-term agency workers like himself. However, his optimistic reaction was tempered by the potential changes in the employment practice of third party employers. Dan had worked several assignments for a large-scale independent company that frequently employed agency staff to cover its regular influxes of work over the course of the year. Dan was therefore anxious that the company's regular demand for agency labour may lead them to create their own workforce of periphery temporary staff, allowing them to avoid paying the extra costs to the temporary employment agency that the

Directive may demand. In her role as an employer of agency staff, Cathy was able to recollect the time she had worked in the industry as an employee:

We didn't get sick pay. We didn't get holiday pay. We had to work our hours. We had to work a certain amount of hours to obviously accrue them and get your holiday pay and your sick pay, and that was hard work. I think it will be easier for them.

Cathy recalled some difficult experiences during her time as an agency worker, and ensured that the agency staff she employed in her management role had access to the positive aspects of employment that she had lacked. Despite the potential increases in costs that the Directive represented to Cathy as an employer, the efforts she had made to improve the experiences of the company's agency workers prior to the adoption of the Directive would undoubtedly temper its impact. An element of sympathy regarding the difficulties agency workers faced was often demonstrated by the non-agency worker participants of the sample, with several individuals arguing that they deserved the benefits outlined in the Directive.

11.3. Agency Workers deserve the Directive

For many participants, the perceived fairness of the Directive often relied heavily upon comparisons regarding the levels of effort exhibited by permanent and agency staff. When similar efforts in identical roles were demonstrated by individuals from different worker groups, justification of disparities in pay and treatment between these groups became difficult. As an agency worker, Dan G considered the Directive a logical and appropriate development in the employment of agency staff:

I think it's right that you should have the same benefits, because at the end of the day... you should still be putting, and probably are putting in, the same efforts, and you should get the same rewards as permanent staff.

In his role as an agency worker, Dan felt that the effort he put into his work was equal to that of his permanent worker colleagues, but his status as an agency worker ensured that he would be paid less despite this equal effort. Dan argued that this disparity in treatment was hard to rationalise, and reacted in a positive manner to the changes outlined in the Agency Workers Directive. In her role as a recruitment consultant, Jenny also argued that the level of commitment demonstrated by the agency worker was also associated with the rewards provided by the Directive:

If you've got good candidates who have been working for clients for a long period of time, you know it doesn't give them more benefits [pre-Directive].

You know if they then get the holiday and get whatever else with it, for them that's fantastic, because obviously they're showing dedication to the company.

For many agency workers, the nature of their short-term roles severely hampered commitment, and the improvements to agency worker contracts demanded by the Directive will only apply to individuals whose tenures exceed three months. The inclusion of end dates, or the lack of obligation for open-ended contracts between agency workers and their third party employers, often limit the proportion of agency worker assignments exceeding this tenure, and Jenny argued that the commitment and dedication exhibited by individuals involved in longer-term assignments should be rewarded. For some, tenure was regarded as less important when gauging the value that agency workers represented to their third party employers. As a permanent worker, Sam argued that the rewards resulting from the Directive should reflect the level of training and skill obtained by the agency worker:

You get the agency staff coming along and they're unskilled and they need to be trained up... if they get trained up to a certain point, then I think they should increase their pay to the same as us.

In his permanent role, Sam and his colleagues were required to complete a series of training procedures before they were able to fully benefit the company. The increased use of agency labour often created problems, as individuals were often limited by deficiencies in training, and the more experienced employees like Sam were required to make up the outstanding work that this often created. In these cases, tenure became irrelevant, as the level of training dictated an individual's value to the small team of which they were a part. This led Sam to comment that pay and treatment should reflect the level of training, as this was integral to the day-to-day functioning of his own team. The increased job security resulting from the Directive was also highlighted as a positive development. As a middle-manager, Nick M was concerned about the lack of protection inherent in the contracts of the agency workers which his company used, and argued that the increased protection resulting from the Directive was a welcome development:

I think they do need protection. I think agency workers are quite easy to kind of fob off as nobody's problem that nobody needs to look after. I think there is definite need to protect them, because it's quite easy for them to just not be used, and then we've got a large number of people who are out of work. The agency does provide us with an opportunity to plug our gaps when we're short of employees.

Whilst Nick was rarely involved in the decision to employ agency workers, he was regularly required to assign them tasks. He became concerned by the lack of responsibility demonstrated by his superiors in relation to the agency worker group, and often considered the benefits provided by agency staff to be inappropriate. The sheer lack of protection possessed by his agency colleagues led him to react positively to the steps outlined in the Directive, even though they were relatively basic in permanent worker terms. The contractual improvements resulting from the Agency Workers Directive also ensures equal access to permanent roles within an organisation, leading many participants to comment upon the increased likelihood of these transitions taking place.

11.4. Effect on Transitions

Prior to the Directive, the fee often demanded by temporary employment agencies led many third party employers to exclude the agency workers in their organisation from applying for permanent worker roles, regardless of the associated experience and the organisation-specific knowledge they may have accrued during their employment. When combined with the accumulation of benefits outlined in the Directive, many participants voiced doubt as to why agency staff affected by these changes were not transferred onto permanent contracts. As an agency worker, Mike made this very point:

If you've been somewhere for three months... I'd find it odd that the company that you worked for hadn't taken you on as permanent staff anyway, rather than having to pay the agency... I would have thought if you'd been worked well enough, and they were happy to have you there for the last three months, then they wouldn't just offer you a permanent position in their company and make you a permanent member of their staff and not part of the agency staff.

Prior to the adoption of the Agency Workers Directive, the long-term employment of an individual in an agency worker role was easily justified if the combined cost of their wage and the temporary employment agency's commission was less than, or similar to, the wage the individual would collect if they possessed a permanent role. The confusion Mike described was informed by the requirement outlined in the Directive for the third party employers to pay agency staff the same as equivalent permanent staff, as well as the continued commission demanded by the temporary employment agency. This development was considered by recruitment consultants like Jason to be a significant aspect of the new Directive:

[Companies will ask] "If they're going to stay on our books, how could we

justify paying the same salary as our own staff, plus [the agency] charges on top?" I think it will be more of the temp-to-perm route than they do at the moment... There will be no long-term business for recruitment agencies, because after thirteen weeks the companies probably won't be able to justify paying that extra.

Whilst the Directive will have little effect upon assignments lasting less than three months, Jason highlighted a key concern for temporary employment agencies supplying agency workers over longer periods of time. Open-ended assignments lasting many months represented a sizeable proportion of the income Jason generated in his role, yet he predicted that the adoption of the Directive would lead many organisations to question their methods of utilising agency staff in their company. The changes that result from this introspection may damage the revenue generated by agencies, as company interest in long-term assignments may drop significantly. Whilst changes in agency worker utilisation resulting from the Directive were considered significant for temporary employment agencies and client companies, several participants also identified a number of potentially problematic changes that would affect individual agency workers.

11.5. Change in the way Agency Workers are used

The adoption of the Agency Workers Directive will almost certainly cause companies that regularly use agency labour to review their employment practices and consider steps to avoid the increased costs resulting from the Directive's changes. Many participants feared the introduction of a three-month limit on the lower costs of employing agency workers would force the hand of companies. Ivan voiced this concern, identifying it as a potential downside to a Directive aimed at helping agency workers like him.

The downside from the worker's point of view is that they might just 'can' somebody after two months and twenty-nine days, so it might even lead to a higher turnover of agency staff. Someone who may have had a successful time for six months or nine months, a year would get 'canned' in three months, just so they don't have to give them the same rights and same access to the same facilities. They might just 'can' them and get a replacement.

For individuals looking to prove their worth as potential permanent employees, the equal treatment demanded by the Directive after three months may inadvertently sabotage a permanent transition that may have occurred after six months. For Ivan, the Agency Workers Directive represented an ultimatum that the individual agency worker may not have chosen to communicate. The demands imposed upon the company may result in an ironic loss of power on the part of the individual, as the

Directive attempting to improve the rights of the agency worker may unintentionally damage their employment prospects with the organisation. Jason was asked in his role as a recruitment consultant whether the changes outlined in the Directive would effectively benefit agency workers:

As long as there are no loopholes, because obviously if there's a loophole, a company could just say after twelve weeks "just get rid, I want someone else", start another twelve weeks, "get rid". It could be a continuous circle that way... but if there isn't then yeah, it'll affect the candidate. It'll be the best thing for them... it seems a bit strange that they are still carrying on using agency after thirteen weeks and then pay us more, for the same person after thirteen weeks. No, I don't think that will work.

For Jason, the absence of loopholes was key to the success of the Directive, as failing to enforce the Directive effectively would not only limit the benefits, but may also prove detrimental to agency workers seeking a long-term and reliable source of employment. As a result of the Directive, companies keen to avoid the increased costs of utilising an agency worker for more than three months are likely to be left with two choices. Whilst ensuring the utilisation of an individual agency worker does not exceed a three-month period, companies may also choose to offer the agency worker a permanent transition into the workforce. Whilst individuals motivated by a transition into permanent employment may consider this a positive result, individuals desiring the flexibility often associated with agency employment may consider such a development undesirable and at odds with their motives for pursuing employment as an agency worker. In this role, Jamie described the negative reaction he experienced when offered the option to go permanent:

I had been there quite a while. They knew who I was. They knew a lot about me. They knew what I could do, and at the end of the day there was that opportunity to go onto a [permanent] contract, but, to me and a lot of other people in the same position, it was a piece of paper that tied you in, with terms and conditions and more things to follow. It just over-complicated things and made things more stressful, so it's sometimes just easier to stay as you were.

Like many others, employment as an agency worker represented the early stages of Jamie's career. He was uncertain of his career path, and enjoyed the lack of obligation demanded from his employers as a result of his agency worker status. After several months as an agency worker in one of his later assignments, he was offered the same role in a permanent capacity, and reluctantly accepted. The increased financial incentive for organisations to offer permanent contracts to agency workers who exceed three-month tenures may prove problematic for

individuals like Jamie, as the motives the workers possess in the pursuit of agency employment may strongly affect their reaction to the offer of a permanent transition. Whilst differences in the utilisation of agency staff have been highlighted as a possible outcome of the Directive, the increased financial burden of employing agency workers for more than three months may also reduce the attraction of using agency staff entirely.

11.6. The Reduced Utilisation of Agency Workers

One of the key criticisms aimed at the Agency Workers Directive has related to the timing of its adoption. The reduced workforce flexibility and the potential for increased costs symbolised by the Directive are a key concern, and these organisational issues have been exacerbated by efforts to cut costs resulting from the current recession. This situation represented the context in which participant interviews took place, and a fear of fewer employment opportunities voiced by agency workers like Dan N was an unsurprising consequence:

In my experience, in [name of city], there were so few decent positions that I was told about, that I thought that if that went to an even narrower band, that's detrimental to being an agency worker. So actually no, I think this is probably a bad idea. If it's less attractive to companies, then they're always trying to find another solution... I can't see into the future, but I think it's a bad thing.

During his time in the UK, Dan had experienced a variety of agency working assignments, yet found searching for preferable roles frustrating and difficult. The potential reduction in opportunities stemming from the planned adoption of the Agency Workers Directive instilled a sense of anxiety in Dan, who relied upon frequent access to roles through his agency. The main focus of the Directive is to improve the working experiences of individuals, and Dan argued that increased demands placed upon organisations in order to help individuals would reduce the attraction of hiring agency staff, and eventually cut back on the opportunities available. As a manager in a company that had frequently used agency staff in the past, Nick M argued that the company reaction feared by Dan was likely:

It will be another nail in the coffin for not using them. I think it would be another reason for them to say "well, we're already trying to save money by not having them, their wage is higher anyway". Because of the associated fees, I think if they have that extra burden of having to give them the holiday as well, I think that would definitely push them more to using more direct staffing only.

During the interview, Nick outlined how the dual financial layout of paying both the

wage of the individual and the commission of the temporary employment agency had already taken its toll on the employment practices of his company. The utilisation of agency labour had been identified as a potentially avoidable cost by the organisation, and Nick argued that the adoption of the Directive would serve to increase the opinion. Savings may be made in relation to sick pay, pensions, and public holidays, yet Druker and Stanworth (2001) highlighted that these may be offset by the agency's ongoing commission charges. The efforts to save money had led Nick's company to consider other approaches to fulfilling its staffing requirements in an effort to reduce its reliance upon temporary employment agencies. These efforts will undoubtedly translate into a loss of business for temporary employment agencies, and as a recruitment consultant, Jason voiced his fears:

I think it will be damaging for recruitment agencies, because a lot of recruitment agencies have people who've been on temporary contracts for two years doing warehouse, and they've always been paid less than the extra staff working at the companies, but after thirteen weeks they can't do that anymore.

Temporary employment agencies are likely to have agency workers on their books engaged in assignments of varying lengths, yet Jason argued that such variety was likely to disappear. The Agency Workers Directive will enforce equal treatment on aspects that include pay, holiday allowance, breaks, and rest periods, yet these changes only come into force after a twelve-week qualifying period (BIS, 2010). These increased demands will reduce the financial justification for employing agency workers in assignments which exceed three months, as individuals engaged in short-term arrangements will receive fewer improvements resulting from the Directive.

11.7. Not much will Change

For the agency workers in the sample, assignment lengths varied from several hours to nine months, yet the majority of tenures often stood at less than three months. As a result, the changes described in the Agency Workers Directive would have applied to the minority of assignments, and this would be prior to any future changes in agency worker utilisation resulting from the Directive's adoption. As a result, many of the recruitment consultants like Jenny were unconcerned by the alterations set out in the Directive:

I think with a lot of the assignments we deal with, a lot of them are more short term anyway... I don't think it will change a lot of the general shorter

day-to-day things... I don't think it will make much difference there.

Jenny's lack of concern regarding the Directive's changes stemmed from the fact that the vast majority of the assignments she offered her workers included short-term tenures that would bypass the added contractual requirements of the legislation. Facilitating the ability of third party employers to meet peaks in demand was a recurring task for the recruitment consultants in the sample. An example of the company usage was provided by James, who reported the actions of the client company he worked for as an agency worker:

They took on a lot of students over the summer. They were only two month jobs, so they wouldn't always be looking to take people on for three months anyway.

The employment of students over the summer months can provide companies like James' with a large pool of available employees. As a result, students like James make up a sizeable portion of the individuals employed as agency workers, yet the opportunities outside of term-time will often ensure that assignment tenures remain under the three-month qualifying period. Whilst many agency assignments may include fixed end dates, companies that require cover for longer periods of time may be more inclined to employ individual agency workers on open-ended contracts. As a recruitment consultant, Simon predicted how the Directive would impact upon employment practices such as these:

I suspect it [the Directive] will have a minimal effect, just because I suspect a lot of those longer-term temp roles would have... become contract. It'll change the shape of it a bit, but I don't suppose it will probably affect too much. Maybe a slight reduction, but probably not too much.

For companies knowing they will need staff for longer than three months, employing agency workers in an open-ended assignment has provided ideal cover in the past. However, the Directive may require companies to clarify their need for temporary help, and consider approaching fixed-term contractors in order to avoid increased costs once staffing demands exceed three months. Simon anticipated the requirements of his role to change, as he expected his client companies to exhibit a greater reliance on short-term staffing solutions, whilst going elsewhere when meeting longer-term requirements. Despite the apparent focus on organisational staffing practices since the decision to adopt the Agency Workers Directive was reached, an effect on pre-existing permanent members of staff has also been considered.

11.8. Pressure on Permanent Workers

Whilst the reaction of third party employers has been the focus of concern since the agreed adoption of the Agency Workers Directive, the impact on permanent workers has also been identified as a potential issue. In the current study, several of the participants cited the possibility of an adverse and negative permanent worker reaction to the adoption of the Directive. As a permanent worker, Nick M considered the likely reaction of his permanent colleagues:

I think it will possibly cause a bit of aggravation amongst our permanent workers, because they would see the whole point of them being permanent and offering themselves directly to that one company and getting the perks of that while they're doing it, so if an agency worker gets the freedom of whatever company they want to work for, and they get to pick and choose a little bit more and have the same rights as everyone else who works there, I can see some of our employees being a bit 'brassed off' with that a little bit. They seem to be getting benefits without putting in the same amount of commitment... It could definitely induce some sort of antagonism between the two.

For Nick and his colleagues, the reduction in rights and financial incentives available to agency workers represented a fair reflection of their increased flexibility and lack of obligation to the company. By equalising these disparities, the Directive would instil unease and discontent among the permanent workforce. Another anxiety voiced by participants related to how any increase in agency worker costs would be met by the company. As a recruitment consultant, Simon argued that perks present within permanent worker contracts may be sacrificed to meet any increase in financial demand:

I suspect in terms of the permanent employees... we'll see the purging of benefits. Benefits will just be, I imagine, done to the sword... pension schemes will be in trouble, they are already, but I think a lot of extra benefits will be stripped out of permanent workers.

Whilst the changes in legislation are aimed at reducing the contractual differences of permanent workers and agency workers exceeding three-month tenures, withdrawing the benefits of permanent employees in order to reduce the cost of equalisation would almost certainly create an adverse reaction in the permanent staff, to which agency workers may be at least partially held responsible. To avoid the potentially negative reactions outlined by Nick and Simon above, companies may aim to cut back on their levels of agency worker usage to minimise the risk of increased staffing costs or loss of permanent worker privileges. However, in his

agency working role, Yomi suggested that such action may also have a negative influence upon the permanent workforce:

I would have said initially that companies would have to get permanent staff to do overtime or extended hours, but then there's another EU Directive that will put a cap on that. You know at some point the whole thing begins to drive up costs for the company and ultimately, ultimately for consumers, and it's just a vicious circle.

Extending the hours of permanent workers to cover the shortfalls created by reduced agency worker utilisation was a concern voiced by several participants. The increased demands and extra pressure placed upon the permanent workforce as a result of these employment practices may prove detrimental to permanent staff, creating a contrast in benefits between the two worker groups. By increasing the advantages of agency working for individuals, the Directive has the potential to create several negative implications for permanent employees. This has led permanent staff to call into question the need for such legislation.

11.9. Agency Workers don't deserve the Directive

For several participants, the decision to adopt legislation aimed at improving the rights of agency staff represented an excessive action. Permanent workers regularly felt that their agency counterparts had entered into an employment situation on their own volition, and that the problems they faced as a result were counterbalanced by their limited need to demonstrate loyalty and commitment towards the third party employer. As a permanent worker who was regularly employed alongside agency workers, Kris gave a mixed response when asked whether the Directive should be implemented:

If they do all the same tasks and all at the same level, but I suppose it comes down to loyalty as well. They can just break off and disappear. They probably only need a day's notice.

Kris felt that he had entered into a mutual agreement with his company in a permanent capacity, and that the resulting benefits should be withheld from agency staff who had failed to demonstrate loyalty to a single organisation. By opening themselves up to a variety of potential employers, several permanent participants argued that agency workers conceded their rights to access equivalent levels of treatment. Despite his role as an agency worker, Baz also considered the changes outlined in the Directive as unnecessary and inappropriate:

I still think that permanent workers should have... shall we say, preference

on certain things, compared to agency staff... I'm not sure I agree with that [the Directive]... You know you're only a temp worker, so I'm not sure that all things should be the same as permanent staff.

As an agency worker, Baz felt uncomfortable with the changes set out by the Directive, arguing that the status of agency staff should restrict treatment that was equal to their permanent worker counterparts. For each of the agency worker participants, permanent employment was considered a preferable target that agency work could lead to, and the advantages it encompassed were often considered a fair reflection of this desirable status. Whilst negative reaction from permanent staff was a concern of the recruitment consultants in the sample, anxiety was also voiced over the lack of third party employer understanding relating to the adoption of the Directive.

11.10. Lack of Understanding

For the recruitment consultants in the sample, understanding regarding the Agency Workers Directive was consistently high, as many considered it a potentially influential change to employment law that would affect the running of their businesses. However, concern was raised by the strongly contrasting levels of understanding that these recruitment consultants had witnessed in the organisations to which they supplied workers. As a branch manager in a major chain of temporary employment agencies, Nick P took steps to ensure his client companies were well informed about the Directive once adoption had been agreed, yet the reaction he encountered surprised him:

You have to actually educate the clients... I've actually had to phone round and invite people to the seminars from HR departments who use agencies to supply their staff, and the majority cannot attend and have no interest in attending... I've never known so much apathy from companies, bearing in mind we only approach people that actually use [agency staff]... Do you want to know the percentage of the uptake on that? Two percent! Two percent of a free convenient [seminar], because they're local as well... Two percent! That's ninety-eight percent who've either done a lot of reading, or don't care (laughs), so hopefully they're all being implemented well, and it'll work for everyone. It's one of them with fingers crossed.

For Nick, the anxiety caused by the lack of understanding was greatly increased after he encountered the sheer lack of interest from companies who regularly utilised his services. A sudden drop in agency worker usage resulting from company's lack of preparation for the Directive was feared by recruitment consultants, who argued that minor changes in the way organisations engaged the services of temporary employment agencies were all that were needed to avoid

experiencing increased charges. Nick argued that companies failing to understand the Directive's changes prior to the date of the adoption would be caught out, thereby increasing the risk of a sudden reduction in demand that could prove damaging to the industry.

11.11. Summary

Participant reaction to the adoption of the Agency Workers Directive was mixed, mirroring the reaction of trade unions and social commentators. Of the participants in the sample, only the recruitment consultants possessed a consistently strong level of understanding regarding the Agency Workers Directive, as it was this group that it affected the most. This meant that other participants required a brief outline of the Directive and its proposed changes in order to gain an informed reaction. Whilst the small-scale qualitative nature of the research limits the study's ability to draw large-scale inferences on the effect of the legislation on the UK labour market, the lack of company understanding highlighted by the current study suggests that the findings of major quantitative company surveys, such as the 'Eversheds' (2008) survey outlined in chapter four, may be based upon organisational opinions that are ill-informed and reactionary.

The involvement of trade unions in the UK's decision to adopt the Directive has been difficult to ignore, and the reaction to the change in legislation varied considerably. Whilst the TUC campaigned for equal treatment from day one, the Directive's adoption still represented a favourable outcome for a worker group that the TUC has frequently labelled 'vulnerable' (TUC, 2008). The CBI has strongly disputed the impression that all agency workers can be classed as 'vulnerable' (CBI, 2008a), but claimed that the latest proposal represented the least worst outcome for British businesses (CBI, 2008f). A key component of this debate since the agreed adoption of the Agency Workers Directive has been the length of the qualifying period for equal rights. Whilst calls for an immediate enforcement were made (TUC, 2007a), others argued that a twelve-month tenure should be fulfilled (CBI, 2008d). The final agreement reached between the CBI and TUC placed this qualifying period at three months, dividing agency workers into those that would qualify, and those that would not.

For the majority of participants in the current study, tenures ranged from single days to two months, whilst others were employed on open-ended contracts that exceeded, or were set to exceed, this three-month guideline. However, dividing current assignment lengths based upon a future Directive's requirements has limited

validity, as this fails to take into account any changes in the employment practices of companies that are likely to take place. By ensuring that agency assignments are set to last less than three months, companies will be able to avoid the changes outlined in the Directive. However, several participants argued that this represented a loophole that could inhibit effective enforcement of the Directive. By preventing many agency workers from exceeding this tenure, the Directive may restrict the freedom and opportunities of agency workers who would otherwise be happy to continue under the same employment arrangements indefinitely.

Short-term agency worker utilisation was often associated with extreme examples of heightened demand, and these were witnessed during the current research in service-based industries like 'silver service' or event management. Many agencies will specialise in the short-term provision of labour demanded by these events, and the short tenures inherent in these assignments will typically mean that these agencies and their clients will remain unaffected by the Agency Workers Directive in its current form. The agency staff based in longer-term assignments were often employed in open-ended contracts with no specific end-dates, whilst others had exceeded their pre-defined end-dates due to the ongoing needs of their third party employers. These workers were unsure of their future with the company, as further clarification from either the agency or company was often not forthcoming. Changes in the current Directive are likely to target workers such as these, yet the results may not be beneficial, as companies keen to avoid increased costs may put an end to the longer-term assignments that agency workers have frequently reported to favour. Indications that companies would increase the demands of the permanent workforce to cover the short-falls of these changes were also present in the current study, and coincide with concerns raised by other commentators (Eversheds, 2008; McNeill, 2008).

Perhaps the most likely outcome of the Directive identified by the study related to the increased demand from third party employers to clarify and plan their use of agency staff. Baz was told that his assignment would last approximately six months, yet he had been employed for over nine months at the time of our interview, and had not been updated on his assignment's end date by the organisation. At the time of the interview, exceeding a three-month tenure would not have held any excess financial or legal burdens for the company, yet the changes brought in by the Directive would drastically increase the disadvantages from a company perspective, and would be likely to change the way such a company engaged the services of agency workers in the future. The pre-existing levels of treatment exhibited by

temporary employment agencies and their client companies prior to the Directive's adoption were also found to be significant. Several participants in the sample had already taken steps to ensure better treatment for the agency workers they hired or placed on assignment, and these actions would greatly limit the degree of changes required by the Directive when it comes into force on the 1st of October, 2011.

The last four chapters have assessed the findings collected by the study in the areas of motives, the temporary employment agency, the third party employer, and the Agency Workers Directive. The following chapter will bring together the key findings of these chapters, and attempt to identify the major themes in relation to the title and research questions of the thesis.

12. Discussion

12.1. Introduction

The current chapter will conclude the thesis by summarising the key points of the earlier chapters, and considering the findings of the research in relation to the thesis's research questions, which were as follows:

- 1) To what extent have temporary employment agencies provided employment opportunities to vulnerable groups since the year 2000?
- 2) How are individuals psychologically affected by working as temporary agency workers, and what are the implications?
- 3) Individual agency workers often interact with several different groups including temporary employment agencies, third party employers, and permanent workers. Are there tensions that exist between these groups, and how do they manifest themselves?
- 4) Recent legislative development has occurred with the adoption of the Agency Workers Directive. What are the implications for individual agency workers and temporary employment agencies?

By applying qualitative research methods and evaluating several different viewpoints associated with the employment of agency workers in the UK, the current thesis has increased understanding into some of the key areas of conflict encountered by previous studies. The current chapter will begin by reiterating the four research questions, and the findings that resulted from posing them. Exploring the vulnerability of agency workers was central to the aim of the first question, and its influence upon the psychological well-being of individuals also made it significant to the second question. Flexibility is frequently cited as a strong incentive of agency working for individuals and third party employers, although this benefit has been called into question by prior research. Several of the study's participants reported concern over the flexibility they experienced during their assignments, and the resultant problems they encountered ensured its importance in relation to the second research question. Flexibility was often a key factor in the forming and maintaining of relationships between the major parties involved in agency working. Incorporating multiple perspectives into the research design enabled the study to explore the relationships between these major parties, and the chapter will continue

by highlighting findings from the third research question. Considering multiple viewpoints also enabled the study to establish reaction to the Agency Workers Directive, and findings will be considered in relation to the fourth research question.

Chapter seven indicated a number of limitations specific to the method applied by the study, and several more general limitations will also be identified and explored. The chapter will also identify a number of potential options for future studies to pursue in the area, including further research into the implications of the Agency Workers Directive, the benefits that agency employment may provide individuals attempting to secure permanent roles, and permanent worker reaction to agency worker usage.

Contributing to knowledge is integral to any thesis, and the current study achieved this objective by utilising qualitative methods of enquiry to explore the research questions outlined above. The chapter's closing stages will outline the study's most significant contributions to knowledge, before concluding with final remarks.

12.2. Conclusions

The current study has been guided by the four initial research questions outlined at the start of the chapter reiterated at the start of the present chapter. Analysis of the data collected during the research led to a series of interesting findings that will now be presented, along with the research questions they resulted from.

12.2.1. To What Extent do Temporary Employment Agencies Provide Employment Opportunities to Vulnerable Groups?

In December 2008, the decision to adopt the Agency Workers Directive reignited discussions surrounding the vulnerability of agency workers throughout Europe. Chapter four outlined the ongoing debate between the TUC and CBI, and research at an individual level has raised doubt over the reduced obligation and lack of security inherent in the contract (e.g. De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007; Forde & Slater, 2005), disparities in treatment with permanent staff (e.g. Nienhüser & Matiask, 2006; Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002), and the psychological consequences of employment as an agency worker (e.g. Forde & Slater 2006; Hall, 2006). Exploring the perceived vulnerability of agency workers emerged as an objective of the thesis, most notably addressed by the study's first and second research questions. Conclusions to the study's second research question will be forwarded in section

12.3.2. below, which will consider the impact of perceived vulnerability by exploring the psychological consequences of employment as an agency worker.

Research has also indicated the potential contributions temporary employment agencies can make to the social and economic fabric of Europe, most notably by reducing levels of unemployment through aiding the supply and deployment of workers (CIETT, 2000). The importance of effectively matching individuals with employment has increased in recent years, and assessing the success temporary employment agencies achieve in this area was a key objective of the study's first research question.

Assessing the vulnerability of individuals prior to agency employment is a difficult and subjective process, but motives will often provide an indication. Individuals who are involuntarily motivated to enter agency work may do so due to difficult circumstances like redundancy, long-term unemployment, or a desperate need for funds. The sheer variety of motives identified in chapter eight indicated the agency employment industry's potential ability to assist individuals possessing a wide range of backgrounds and needs, and this can make assessing levels of vulnerability problematic. Drawing generalisable conclusions on the degree of vulnerability exhibited by the agency workers encountered in the current study is therefore a difficult but unsurprising problem, and reflects the continuing debate surrounding the implementation of the Agency Workers Directive.

A potential explanation for this variety could stem from the ability of temporary employment agencies to provide fast access to paid employment. This is a frequently recurring incentive that attracts individuals from a variety of contexts, from inexperienced teenage workers attempting to accumulate funds before entering education, to middle-aged and highly-experienced redundancy sufferers aiming to maintain a steady stream of income to support their families. Workers from opposite ends of the spectrum would rarely work as equals in a permanent employment context, yet I found individuals such as these placed in identical roles with the same company by the same recruitment consultant on several occasions during my time as an agency worker. A nomothetic research method that is keen to establish differences between permanent and agency worker groups may use these shared characteristics to justify the categorisation of such staff, yet findings from the current study indicate the importance of variables like individual motives, circumstances, and future plans. These differences could provide at least a partial

explanation for the conflicting viewpoints that exist in the debate surrounding the Agency Workers Directive.

Whilst labelling a whole worker group as 'vulnerable' could be considered a misleading exaggeration, the frequently voiced belief that agency assignments represent an inferior form of employment signifies that many participants considered their worker status as undesirable. As a result, the circumstances that lead these individuals into agency employment are often difficult, suggesting that they could be considered vulnerable to some extent. This was certainly the case for several of the study's participants, as recent redundancy or migration had left them with little option other than to approach a temporary employment agency for work. Participants were often keen to avoid long-term exposure to agency work, yet frequently highlighted the short-term benefits that the employment provided. Agency working undoubtedly provides assistance to vulnerable individuals by representing an alternative option to unemployment, and this avenue of support could prove highly beneficial to people experiencing difficult circumstances.

12.2.1.1. Experience

Another form of assistance highlighted by temporary employment agencies is the provision of potentially beneficial experience to the individual. The argument that agency working provides valuable experience was partially supported by the findings, yet these benefits are severely limited by assignment length, the assignment's placement in a career context, and the motives that lead an individual into pursuing agency employment. Findings suggested that the individuals who were most likely to obtain useful work experience during the time they spent as agency workers were those in the early stages of their careers, as assignments typically contained relatively simplistic tasks that reflected the shorter tenures. Whilst these benefits are less likely to take the form of qualifications of quantifiable skills, the benefit of general experience should not be underestimated in relation to obtaining and remaining in a job, with all the non-specific forms of learning it provides. Previous quantitative research has established the frequency of direct temp-to-perm transitions resulting from agency work (e.g. Amuedo-Dorantes, 2000), but assessing the indirect benefits of experience is a considerably more complex area to which qualitative research methods may be better suited.

The value agency workers receive from general work experience can depend upon the stage that an individual is at in their career, as benefits are more likely to be limited for those who have spent longer periods of time in employment. One

example could be workers who have been made redundant after many years of service, as the possession of experiences derived from their time in employment is likely to negate benefits that would prove useful for first-time jobbers or inexperienced individuals. Although the incentive for obtaining experience may be reduced, agency working may benefit these workers in different ways. The relatively fast access to work that temporary employment agencies represents may allow individuals to avoid large gaps of unaccounted time on a C.V, whilst others who are motivated by a change in career path may be introduced into a new industry, albeit in a relatively low status role. In conclusion, the likelihood that agency working can provide opportunities to accrue experience is significantly hampered by the low-skilled tasks and short-term nature which characterises the industry. Individuals at the start of their careers are likely to receive several advantages from the experience of working, yet highly-skilled staff from long-term employment are far less likely to benefit in this manner. This finding may mean that participant age could negatively correlate with the advantages of experience obtained during agency work, but forwarding this as a causal link may prove problematic.

12.2.1.2. The Lack of Training Available to Agency Workers

The potential difficulty individuals may encounter when attempting to gain experience is not the only barrier to career advancement resulting from short-term and low-skilled assignments. In the case of multiple assignments with pre-defined end dates, employment may become segmented and cyclical in nature, whilst long-term open-ended assignments will often remain precarious due to the agency working contract. In either case, low levels of training are likely to exist. Short-term assignments may only include introductory training that is essential to the immediate tasks encountered by the agency worker. With open-ended long-term assignments, employers may be reluctant to invest in training workers who they perceive to have less commitment and fewer contractual obligations towards the company. Tan and Tan (2002) argued that if the agency trained its workers, they would improve their satisfaction and performance, and increase the likelihood that a long-term relationship with the third party employer would be established.

The lack of training was reflected during interviews with participants, who rarely reported effective access to training opportunities during their time as agency workers. My own experience as an agency worker coincided with these reports, as my training took the form of a basic introduction to the tasks I would be doing, and little else. Basic quantitative assessments of the levels of training agency workers

receive, such as the Labour Force Survey, may prove misleading, as the instances of training reported by respondents are not likely to extend beyond a basic introduction to their roles. The disparity in training between permanent and agency workers undermines the degree of benefit provided by the agency employment industry, yet the lack of obligation between the worker and their two 'employers' ensures this disparity is likely to remain. Offering increased access to training opportunities in return for greater commitment towards their employers may serve to attract a greater number of prospective agency workers, but the employer's preference for investing in permanent staff is unlikely to change. Research comparing worker group access to training has argued that agency staff receive limited access in comparison with their permanent counterparts (e.g. Aronsson, Gustafsson, & Dallner, 2002; Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002), and this represents one of the disparities that have been targeted by the changes outlined in the Agency Workers Directive.

12.2.2. How does Agency Working Psychologically affect Individuals, and what are the Implications?

Whilst the first research question of the thesis considered the potential 'societal' impact of providing job seekers and other potentially vulnerable individuals with employment opportunities, the second research question adopted an individual perspective to consider the psychological effect of working as an agency worker. The two questions are strongly linked by the assertion that agency workers may be considered 'vulnerable', and recent debate regarding this term has occurred outside the confines of psychological or sociological research. Advocates of legislative change have argued that agency workers experience disparities in treatment, pay, and employment rights when compared to their permanent counterparts, and the adoption of the Agency Workers Directive indicates that these allegations have been at least partially supported. Psychological enquiry at an individual level is well-placed to assess these claims, and this was the aim of the study's second research question.

12.2.2.1. The Influence of Motive

Previous psychological studies have indicated that greater perceptions of insecurity and anxiety exist in agency staff (e.g. Forde & Slater, 2006; Hall, 2006), although other research has argued that the reduced expectations possessed by these workers can minimise the damage of these perceptions in a way that differs from permanent staff (e.g. De Cuyper & De Witte, 2008). Findings outlined in chapter

eight strongly supported the claim that the perceptions and motives possessed by individuals pre-assignment had a significant impact upon how they view their resulting experiences. Participants who desired paid work that was short-term, temporary, and non-committal stressed the importance of the flexibility they attributed to agency working, and viewed a reduction in employment security and job satisfaction as a fair trade. Findings also coincided with the influence of choice highlighted by previous research, as individuals who appeared to choose agency employment were often more likely to possess positive views about their work. The vast majority of participants viewed agency assignments as inferior to permanent employment, but were quick to acknowledge that the employment their agencies provided them with was well suited to the needs and motives they expressed when initial contact with the agency had been made. These variations indicate the complexity inherent in the concept of 'choice', and conflict with research that seeks to simplify the concept's categorisation as a result. Findings resulting from the study's focus upon motive demonstrated that non-flexible categorisation of 'choice' was shown to be ineffective in predicting individual perceptions of agency working.

12.2.2.2. The Effect of Recession

The timing of the research ensured that the global recession represented a recurring theme throughout the interviews, and its influence upon the psychological well-being of participants soon became evident. One notable finding of the study concerned how permanent workers perceived their company's utilisation of agency staff. Workers from the third party employer often voiced the assumption that any agency workers utilised by their company would be dismissed first, indicating the belief that the value of permanent staff greatly outweighed that of their agency counterparts. By demonstrating increased commitment towards their permanent workforce, organisations effectively create a 'redundancy buffer' that has also been reported by previous researchers (e.g. Bishop, Goldsby, & Neck, 2001; Parker, Griffin, Sprigg, & Wall, 2002). If permanent workers attribute their company's employment actions to this motive, the influx of agency staff will be viewed far more positively by the core workforce. This finding demonstrates that the perception permanent workers apply to their company's decision to utilise agency staff must be identified before further assessment of their reaction can be completed.

The organisation's intention of creating a buffer for its permanent staff positively affected their perceptions of job security, but for agency workers, the opposite was true. Findings suggested that the increased likelihood of 'recession-based'

redundancy combined with the reduced level of obligation inherent in the contract to ensure that agency workers were more likely to be targeted by company-led cutbacks in staff numbers. This leads the research to conclude that agency working does represent a vulnerable form of employment, and the effect of this finding became evident when discussing the psychological well-being of participants. The agency workers interviewed by the study frequently raised concerns over the lack of security within their roles, citing it as the biggest drawback in relation to permanent employment. The recruitment consultants interviewed by the study were quick to acknowledge the increased unpredictability associated with agency working, but argued that this risk was counterbalanced by the increased flexibility resulting from fewer contractual obligations.

12.2.2.3. The Impact of Flexible Working Arrangements

The two most notable examples of flexibility highlighted by participants were the freedom with which agency workers were able to reject undesirable assignment offers from their respective temporary employment agencies, and the ability to prematurely end these assignments without being penalised in the manner permanent workers may encounter. Advantages like these will often be regarded as a counterbalance to the ease in which companies are able to end the employment of its agency staff, although previous research has queried the nature of these advantages (e.g. Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Hall, 2006; Henson, 1996; Rogers, 2000). These contrasting viewpoints helped ensure that, as a form of assistance, the flexible working opportunities of agency employment became a central theme of the research. When attempting to draw conclusions into the levels of flexibility possessed by agency workers in relation to their permanent counterparts, the question 'are agency workers more flexible?' must eventually be asked. Participants with impending access to more desirable options like permanent employment, education, or travel undoubtedly benefitted from the flexibility arising from the reduced obligation inherent in the contract, suggesting an affirmative answer to this question. However, this leads to the second question of 'do agency workers ultimately benefit from their increased flexibility?'. Individuals concerned with securing long-term and reliable sources of income through agency work will be reluctant to exercise the flexible working options they reportedly possess. Therefore, the answer to the second question is harder to clarify, as it will often be dependent upon the motives and circumstances of the worker in question. This conclusion indicates that understanding the value agency workers place upon their flexible working arrangements is significant to assessing their overall benefit.

12.2.3. Are there Tensions that Exist Between the Groups who Interact with the Temporary Employment Industry, and how do they Manifest Themselves?

By incorporating participants from the different groups involved in the employment of agency workers, the research was able to explore the various relationships which can result from the interactions that occur. One of the initial relationships will occur between the individual agency worker and the temporary employment agency they approach.

12.2.3.1. Agency Workers and the Temporary Employment Agency

Fulfilling the needs of the job seeker was found to significantly enhance the relationship with the agency, and this occurs in a number of ways. The fast access to short-term roles that temporary employment agencies provide are ideal for filling time that may otherwise be spent in unemployment, and this is especially helpful to workers who have recently experienced redundancy, or those who have failed to find permanent employment.

The flexible working arrangements facilitated by the agency contract may also allow individuals to pursue, or transfer into, permanent roles with a reduced risk of forfeiting paid employment. The advantage of a stopgap also extends beyond permanent jobseekers, as agency work allows individuals to fill time with paid employment prior to beginning other long-term commitments like full-time education or plans for travel. For others who find themselves worse off financially, agency work could represent a route into part-time employment that supplements the income of a primary job. Participants frequently reported negative experiences with the various employment agencies they approached during their hunt for work, yet this often served to enhance their gratitude and relationship with the recruitment consultants who were able to fulfil their needs and provide employment. Accounting for these negative experiences is significant to understanding the bond which may form between the individual and the temporary employment agency.

For individuals keen to obtain ongoing employment from the agency, maintaining a positive relationship with the recruitment consultant remained a constant priority. Reluctance to risk damaging this relationship often led workers to sacrifice some of the options resulting from the flexibility reportedly offered by this form of working. This could manifest itself as an unwillingness to reject undesirable assignments or

leave such assignments prematurely. An assumption that a more attractive assignment was likely to follow often existed with participants, who felt their best chance of receiving such opportunities rested upon how they were perceived by the temporary employment agency. This often creates an unspoken obligation towards the agency that significantly hampers the degree of flexible that agency workers are prepared to exercise, and casts doubt upon the claims of flexibility made by the industry.

12.2.3.2. Agency Workers and the Third Party Employer

The flexible employment arrangements agency workers possessed were also found to influence the relationship staff built with the third party employers they had been placed on assignment with. Some agency workers considered themselves 'representatives' of the temporary employment agency, and described the desire to uphold its reputation with the client organisation as a key concern. The flexible working options associated with agency employment were found to negatively influence the relationship agency workers built with the organisation and its permanent workforce. This was rarely problematic for individuals concerned with a short-term and non-recurring employment experience, but the opposite was true for staff seeking some form of long-term working relationship with the client company. The actions of the former group often reinforced the perception held by employers that agency workers were unreliable and non-committal, even though this perception conflicted with the motives held by individuals from the latter group. These workers were often hindered by these views, as organisations may be reluctant to offer extended assignments or permanent transitions to staff they consider unpredictable.

The negative influence of flexibility was also reported in the relationship between agency workers and the employer's pre-existing workforce. The perceptions permanent employees held towards their agency worker colleagues were undoubtedly tainted by the belief that they lacked investment in the company as a result of the ease with which they could leave their assignments, and this was cited as a cause for several reported conflicts between these two worker groups. Results indicated that the third party employer's method of agency worker utilisation could also prove detrimental to the relationship formed between permanent and agency staff. Worker groups were frequently segregated and distinguished based-upon their status, often in the form of shift patterns, working environments, uniform, and tasks. These aspects of an agency worker's employment experience often combined to

make them feel inferior to their permanent counterparts, and this often served to further divide the workforce. Quickly boosting staff numbers was a recurring motive for companies, and this often took the form of a rapid and short-lived influx of individuals from the temporary employment agency. Despite benefiting the organisation, this form of agency worker utilisation severely limits the opportunities to form working relationships between groups, and may even damage the employment experiences of those involved.

12.2.3.3. The Temporary Employment Agency and Third Party Employer

The ability to rapidly access staff for varying periods of employment ensures that agency workers represent a viable choice for companies keen to meet customer demand, and temporary employment agencies are uniquely placed to provide this service. Establishing and maintaining working relationships with third party employers by effectively meeting their requirements will often prove integral to the success of the agency, as returning clients will typically represent the majority of an agency's income. Unsurprisingly, fulfilling the flexible staffing needs of client organisations was frequently cited by recruitment consultants as a priority of their role.

Another key skill highlighted by recruitment consultants related to their ability to match the individual with the organisation. The transition of agency workers into permanent roles with the third party employer was regarded as the best possible outcome by recruitment consultants, and the frequency to which this occurred often indicated the strength of the relationship with the client company and the likelihood of repeat business. Preserving long-term relationships with these organisations represents a mutually beneficial situation that will not only ensure a regular income for the agency, but advantages for the client company that include the potential to save on costs relating to the recruitment, selection, induction, and training and development of staff. Benefits such as these demonstrate the value of utilising the services of a temporary employment agency, but critics to recent legislative change have argued that their ability to provide some of these benefits will be severely hampered.

12.2.4. What are the Implications of the Agency Workers Directive?

The fourth research question of the thesis was concerned with understanding the predicted impact of the Agency Workers Directive, with particular focus upon

individual agency workers and the temporary employment agencies that engage them. Despite agreement being reached in December 2008, some uncertainty still exists over how the impending adoption of the Agency Workers Directive will affect the use of agency workers in the UK and throughout Europe. The scale of the impact was typically played down by the recruitment consultants in the sample, with the general consensus suggesting that companies would need to rethink how they used agency labour. The most likely outcome is considered to be a reluctance to employ agency workers on contracts exceeding three months, as this form of utilisation will incur the increased costs outlined in the Directive. Perhaps the most likely outcome of the Directive will be a far greater proportion of assignments with tenures intentionally capped at three months, and such a change is likely to influence the potential benefits agency working can offer individuals.

Findings indicated that the reaction of individual agency workers to the proposed changes to the Directive is likely to be mixed, and will rely heavily upon the motives of these workers in pursuing agency employment. The belief that agency working provides a platform for a potential permanent transition to take place was voiced by several participants, and the impact of the Directive in relation to these transitions remains unclear. Companies ensuring that the tenures of their agency staff do not exceed three months may be more inclined to offer them a permanent transition, or to release them when the assignment end date is reached. The Directive may therefore limit the time individuals have to impress the third party employer, leading to fewer opportunities for agency workers to achieve permanent transitions into companies.

Whilst the Directive's predicted impact upon the chances of permanent transitions may be unclear, the proportion of longer-term assignments will almost certainly drop due to the increased costs they will entail. The greater financial rewards associated with these assignments ensured that the sample's recruitment consultants and agency workers frequently reported a preference for these arrangements, suggesting that the Directive's implementation may prove detrimental to individuals desiring the continuity, reliability, and income provided by these extended assignments. However, agency working was rarely seen by the study's participants as a long-term career option, suggesting that many agency workers will remain relatively unaffected by the changes outlined in the Directive. Before further conclusions can be formulated, focussed post-adoption analysis of the Agency Workers Directive is required.

12.3. Limitations

When reviewing previous psychological studies into the agency employment industry, a notable reliance upon quantitative method was soon identified. The research designs utilised by these studies frequently limited focus to the individual, leading me to apply approaches that were also rooted in sociology. This allowed the thesis to avoid several pitfalls experienced by these previous studies, and enabled the incorporation of various organisational perspectives. In chapter seven, several weaknesses to the study's method were outlined, and their effects were considered in relation to findings. These difficulties were specific to the study's research method, yet an evaluation of the current research indicated several more general limitations. The current chapter will continue by exploring the potential impact of these upon the research.

In line with previous psychological studies into the agency employment industry, the second research question ensured a great deal of focus was placed upon the perceptions and experiences of individual agency workers. However, unlike previous studies, the current thesis also considered the perspectives of other interested parties in order to explore the third research question, including those of recruitment consultants from temporary employment agencies, and management staff from third party employers. Whilst these participants were considered as representatives of their organisation, caution must be exercised when generalising their perspective to that of the companies they represented.

Findings of the current study indicated a great deal of variety in the levels of treatment experienced by agency workers from their temporary employment agencies. Many participants reported negative perceptions towards the efforts of their agencies, claiming they were simply concerned with placing them into an assignment in order to generate income. Some agencies may take steps to increase pay, improve ease of transitions, and increase holiday allowance, but others will pay their agency staff the bare minimum, and make no attempts to improve the experiences of their workers. The recruitment consultants interviewed in the current study often fell into the former group, which is unsurprising considering their willingness to be interviewed. Approximately eight out of every ten agencies I approached declined to take part in the research, and this may have reduced the study's ability to report the poor treatment of agency workers from the perspective of the temporary employment agency. The recruitment consultants interviewed often

acknowledged that questionable practices took place in the industry, but that these were performed by 'other' less reputable temporary employment agencies.

This was a particular problematic when exploring findings relating to the fourth research question, as enquiry concerned the reaction of temporary employment agencies to the adoption of the Agency Workers Directive. By attempting to improve several aspects of the working experiences of their agency workers, many of the recruitment consultants had unknowingly pre-empted the impact that the Directive would have on their working practices. As a result, the adoption of the Agency Workers Directive was rarely considered to be overtly challenging, yet the changes outlined in the Directive are likely to be far more significant for temporary employment agencies that have not taken similar steps.

The difficulty in obtaining participants was an initial concern, as a small sample size could represent a limitation of the research. However, when compared with the quantitative survey-based approaches applied by the majority of studies into the agency employment industry, the richness, depth, and quantity of data gathered from each participant was perceived to offset the reduced sample sizes of the thesis. When combined with information from the follow-up interviews and the large quantity of data gathered from work diary excerpts during my time employed as an agency worker, the cumulative body of findings greatly exceeded the available space in the analysis chapters, indicating that the initial fears regarding sample size were unfounded.

12.4. Future Research

12.4.1. The Agency Workers Directive

Perhaps the most notable area of the agency employment industry for future UK and European research to explore is that of the Agency Workers Directive. As highlighted at the start of the previous chapter, the current research took place after agreement had been reached over adoption of the Agency Workers Directive, but prior to the Directive's implementation into UK law. As with the research and opinions outlined in the earlier chapters, enquiry resulting from the study's fourth research question has been limited to exploring the views of interested parties in relation to the decision to adopt the Directive, and not the effect of the Directive itself. The mixed reaction to the legislation reported by the current and previous research may be a product of timing, as this reaction has been based on prediction, not hindsight. Revisiting the subject of the Agency Workers Directive at a later date

following its implementation represents a logical and potentially insightful approach for future research to consider, as the current study represents a useful benchmark to the assessment of the Directive's effect.

A number of questions stem from the adoption of the Directive. These include the extent to which individual agency workers will actually benefit from the Directive in relation to increased rights, the change in utilisation practice exhibited by third party employers, and the reaction of permanent workers. As with previous studies, the current thesis has been limited to predicting answers to questions such as these, and future post-adoption research will be able to provide a deeper insight into the Directive's impact. Comparisons between European countries may also represent an interesting area of research, as despite adopting the same legislation, international differences may occur in the enforcement and influence of the Directive.

12.4.2. The Utilisation of a Longitudinal Research Design

During the interviews with individual agency workers, the short tenures and multiple assignments that characterised their experiences of employment were soon identified as a potential hindrance to achieving a well-rounded understanding of the participant's time as an agency worker. In order to improve this understanding, these participants were contacted several months after the initial interviews and asked to briefly recount their experiences since their initial discussions took place. The current study included follow-up interviews that provided the study with a longitudinal dimension, yet these follow-up enquiries only provided a brief opportunity to conclude the experiences that were introduced by participants during their initial interviews. Despite providing a more rounded understanding of the overall experiences that participants were encountering at the time of their interview, the reduced level of detail meant that meaningful comparisons beyond the conclusion of the experiences discussed in the primary interviews were severely limited.

Increasing the longitudinal aspect of future research could prove beneficial in a number of ways. One advantage would be an ability to effectively assess agency work as a route to permanent employment. Quantitative research may facilitate large-scale analysis into how often former agency workers move into permanent roles, but the separation of researcher and participant that characterises such approaches may limit understanding into the degree of influence the individual's time spent in agency work had in achieving this transition. One example can be

found in research by Amuedo-Dorantes (2000), whose analysis of the Spanish Labour Force Survey successfully indicated the number of agency workers who had secured permanent roles over the course of a year, yet failed to assess the influence that pre-existing agency roles may have had in this transition. By adopting a longitudinal approach with agency workers seeking permanent transitions, research may be better placed to understand the effect of agency employment, either in the form of direct transitions into similar but permanent roles with the third party employer, or through the indirect benefit of increased work experience.

12.4.3. Increased Focus on Permanent Staff

Few studies into the agency employment industry have explored the perceptions that pre-existing permanent workers have held towards their company's utilisation of agency staff, and these perceptions have rarely represented the sole focus of the research. One exception is the research by Bishop et al (2001), which compared the levels of organisational commitment in permanent workers from two companies. Permanent workers from the company that used contingent labour to protect staff from market fluctuation reported higher levels of organisational commitment compared with levels reported by permanent workers whose company did not use contingent staff in this manner. Biggs and Swailes' (2006) study represents another notable exception, as permanent staff were divided into those that worked with agency workers, and those that did not. After making this distinction, findings varied considerably from those of Bishop et al (2001). The permanent employees who did not work alongside agency staff reported significantly higher levels of organisational commitment than those who did, indicating that the organisation's decision to utilise agency workers may have negatively impacted upon the pre-existing permanent workforce.

Both studies incorporated quantitative questionnaire-based research designs, yet the increased flexibility inherent in the interview-based approach of the thesis allowed permanent workers to describe the perceptions they possessed towards their agency worker colleagues. Despite the relatively small scale of the current study, a variety of organisational motives were identified for the employment of agency staff, including brief but fast influx of workers to fulfil temporarily high workloads, cover for absent permanent staff, and the assessment of individuals for potential permanent transitions. By applying qualitative approaches to data collection, research may be able to increase understanding regarding the various

motives that companies possess for using agency staff, as well as the varying reactions that the permanent workforce may display to each motive.

12.5. Contribution to Knowledge

12.5.1. The Consideration of Multiple Viewpoints

The provision of an in-depth and accurate presentation of the agency employment industry was a major objective of the study's third research question, and adopting a research design that incorporated multiple perspectives was identified as an avenue for obtaining this goal. The approach of psychological investigation places emphasis upon the individual, which has allowed the perspective of agency workers, and to a lesser extent, their permanent counterparts, to be explored. In contrast, large-scale quantitative enquiry like the Labour Force Survey can provide a national context for the employment of agency workers in the UK. When investigating the agency employment industry, the focus of each approach is limited to the sample and datasets addressed by the design. Researchers whose study samples are populated exclusively by agency workers may encounter difficulties when attempting to establish well-rounded conclusions into the major issues affecting the agency employment industry.

In order to avoid this potential obstacle, the thesis incorporated the perspectives of agency workers, recruitment consultants, and representatives of third party employers at various levels. This allowed the thesis to consider viewpoints within the agency employment industry that have been absent from research based upon psychological enquiry and national statistics. Incorporating multiple perspectives was found to be especially useful when exploring the recurring themes and issues associated with the industry. Many of the thesis's conclusions outlined earlier in the chapter benefitted from the variety of viewpoints, including the extent of the flexible employment opportunities available to agency workers, the impact of temp-to-perm transitions, and the treatment experienced by individuals when placed on assignment.

12.5.2. The Integration of a Recruitment Consultant Perspective

The inclusion of industry representatives was especially useful, as recruitment consultants employed by temporary employment agencies had often accrued a great deal of experience and knowledge whilst working in the industry. The absence of this perspective emerged as a frequent weakness when reviewing previous

studies into the agency employment industry, and incorporating it into the current thesis has proved highly beneficial.

The study's second research question enabled a strong and necessary focus upon the perspectives of individual agency workers, yet the short-term and flexible nature of employment potentially meant that participants may have had relatively brief experiences in agency work that may have only totalled days, weeks, or several months. In contrast, the recruitment consultants interviewed as a result of the third research question often possessed many years of experience in the industry. As participants, recruitment consultants offered a wealth of informed data, and their absence from previous studies can be viewed as a significant limitation.

The role of the agency in servicing the needs of the individual agency worker and third party employer provided an insight that few studies possess. The prioritisation of needs soon emerged during interviews as an interesting finding. Previous research has highlighted the position of the third party employer as a paying client, and the recruitment consultants who were interviewed conceded that this meant their needs often took priority over those of the individual agency worker.

Establishing long-term relationships with client companies was cited by recruitment consultants as a significant objective of their roles and vital to the future of the agency, and this served to further the importance of keeping the client happy. In contrast, relationships with individual agency workers were comparatively short term, and the likelihood that these workers would sign up with multiple agencies often limited the extent to which these relationships would prosper. The perception that agency workers demonstrated limited commitment towards the agency was an interesting finding that emerged from the recruitment consultant interviews, as was the positive impact that temp-to-perm transitions were found to have upon the relationship between the two companies.

The levels of flexibility and lack of obligation inherent in the employment arrangements held between the agency worker and the third party employer became recurring themes of the thesis. These characteristics frequently allowed recruitment consultants to provide employment opportunities to potentially vulnerable individuals experiencing a variety of circumstances, and this benefit was explored by investigation resulting from the study's first research question. The study's third research question demanded the perspective of the temporary employment agencies to be considered, and their representatives frequently provided a relatively independent, yet knowledgeable viewpoint. The recruitment

consultants were quick to cite the unpredictability and ease of dismissal that characterised the agency working experiences of many individuals, but were also keen to point out that these workers possessed levels of flexibility which were absent from more traditional contractual arrangements.

The frequent exposure to agency workers experienced by these participants also added weight to the claims of the societal benefits forwarded by large-scale studies, which were a key focus of the first research question. Notable examples included the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the presentation and performance of a candidate, the ability to accurately match individuals with roles, and the potential to provide the worker with ongoing support during their employment. Findings indicated that these advantages were not always present in the experiences of agency workers, but the interviews with recruitment consultants suggest that temporary employment agencies were ideally placed to provide these benefits.

12.5.3. The Flexibility Inherent in the Research Methods

After reviewing previous psychological investigation into the agency employment industry, a reliance upon quantitative method emerged as a recurring characteristic throughout the literature. Despite increasing the ease of cross-study comparison and incorporating larger sample sizes, the restricted nature of participant response was soon identified as a frustrating constraint. This limitation was highlighted as a product of the survey-based approach to data collection that was prevalent throughout the majority of the literature, and the current thesis bypassed many of these restrictions by adopting qualitative methods that had been absent from many previous studies. The degree of flexibility inherent in the semi-structured interviews and ethnographic analysis of diary extracts ensured that more effective analysis could result from each of the four research questions.

Face-to-face meetings with individuals facilitated the discussion of previous experiences, allowing several participants to compare the time they had spent in agency and permanent working arrangements. This provided the welcome addition of hindsight to many responses, and helped build an informed picture of the differences between these two forms of employment. The benefit of accounting for more than one working arrangement with the same participant was also advantageous to understanding the agency employment industry, as an individual's time as an agency worker may often incorporate multiple assignments. In previous quantitative studies, translating psychological concepts and variables into survey items typically prevented responses concerning a participant's previous

assignments, effectively 'shutting out' a potentially rich and expansive source of data. The research design allowed the recollection of past assignments, providing a more rounded and in-depth view of an individual's perception of agency work.

Quantitative research methods rely upon categorising a participant in order to establish cross-group differences, yet this was found at times to be incompatible with the study's aim of incorporating the multiple perspectives within the industry. Interviews were completed with permanent employees who possessed varying degrees of interaction with agency counterparts, and management staff were also found to exert differing levels of influence over the agency workers employed by their company. Grouping these participants into pre-defined categories prevented the study's ability to account for these differences, leading to over-simplified analysis of individual responses. The study's idiographic approach to the findings gathered from participants increased the flexibility of the analysis process, allowing the richness of interview data to be fully explored and understood.

Utilising a survey-based approach to data collection will typically rely upon the distribution of questionnaires via company management or post. This will often greatly increase the number of individuals exposed to the study, yet ensures that responses are self-reported and recorded in isolation. The semi-structured interview approach relies upon two-way communication between the researcher and interviewee, enabling either party to seek clarification regarding the questions asked and the responses given. This significantly reduces the potential confusion that may result from the remote collection of data, and this was particularly evident with enquiry resulting from the second research question. The presence of the researcher enabled psychological variables like organisational commitment and job security to be clarified and related to the situation experienced by the individual agency worker, therefore increasing the validity of the findings. Two-way communication was also found to increase the ease of gathering data relating to the fourth research question. The Agency Workers Directive became UK employment law in October 2011, yet interviews took place before this date. With the exception of the recruitment consultants interviewed, participants were often unaware of the legislation and its effect upon their employment. The utilisation of interviews enabled the Directive to be outlined to the participant. Survey-led enquiry into the opinions employers hold towards the Directive's implementation may assume a level of understanding in the respondent that could prove to be absent or ill-informed, and this limitation may cast doubt upon the validity of the resulting findings gathered by this approach.

12.6. Final Remarks

The current thesis has been an in-depth exploration of the agency working industry at an individual and organisational level. After identifying several of the difficulties encountered in previous research into the area, a research method was devised that included semi-structured interviews and ethnographic analysis. The review of previous literature established that research typically focussed upon the experiences of individual agency workers, and the current research attempted to add to this literature by incorporating representatives of third party employers and recruitment consultants who frequently interacted with agency workers on a daily basis. Encompassing multiple perspectives in this manner is perhaps the most prominent way that the current research has increased understanding of the agency employment industry, and this has created a context in which to consider the impact that agency working can have upon individuals.

The inclusion of multiple perspectives was facilitated by the qualitative approach inherent in the study's research method, and this was noted as a key strength. The increased flexibility resulting from these methods allowed the thesis to overcome many of the limitations reported throughout the agency worker literature. A general obstacle of previous research was considered to be the difficulty these studies would encounter in trying to quantify the sheer variety of experiences reported by agency workers and their permanent counterparts, as well as conflicting allegiances, variation in utilisation practices, and differing motives. Studies into the motives individuals possess when approaching agency work have frequently displayed this variety, and the current thesis was no exception. These findings suggest that the incentives temporary employment agencies can offer allow them to cater to individuals from a wide range of circumstances. The qualitative approaches I applied when gathering my findings were better suited to account for these variations, and ultimately, to improve the understanding in the area.

The importance of understanding the agency employment industry has increased recently for several reasons. The current financial difficulties have led to greater levels of unemployment, and created an insecure marketplace for businesses to function. As the current thesis has shown, agency work can represent a valuable route for individuals into permanent employment, either through permanent transition into a third party employer, or indirectly through the provision of experience that may improve an individual's future chances of securing work. Agency work also represents a flexible and potentially beneficial option for

organisations keen to react to business opportunities without committing to long-term obligations, as fewer obligations exist within an agency worker's contract of employment. This leads to the adoption of the Agency Workers Directive, which many feel may limit the flexibility of European businesses, resulting in increased difficulty in achieving economic stability. With the stakes so high, understanding the agency employment industry is more important than ever.

APPENDIX A: PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

Agency Workers and their Effect on Job Security in Permanent Employees

Temporary agency work has become a central topic of employment discourse in the last few years (Nienhüser & Matiaske, 2006), with a variety of conflicting, and often confusing, definitional, demographical, and psychological findings. Several subsections exist which fall under the bracket of temporary worker. These workers share the fact that their contract of employment with an organisation is not a permanent one; although it may be the case that this is where the similarities end. Temporary Workers are typically classified into four distinct types: Fixed-term contractors, casual workers, agency workers and seasonal workers (Biggs, Burchill, & Millmore, 2006). Agency workers are: "...individuals who enter into a relationship with employment agencies, on the basis that the agency will find them work with a third party called a hirer." (Williams, 2004; p. 239).

Several concerns for individuals have been forwarded in relation to agency working, most notably in relation to perceived flexibility, lack of protection, and wage inequality. Researchers have applied several psychological variables in an effort to understand the impact that these concerns may have upon the individual. Findings have indicated that disparities between agency and permanent workers exist in the form of reduced job satisfaction (Booth, Fransconi, & Frank (2002), Job security (Forde & Slater, 2006), and organisational commitment (de Gilder, 2003). Research has also indicated that agency workers may have a detrimental impact upon the pre-existing permanent workers of the third party employer (Biggs, Senior, & Swailes, 2002). The study formulated three hypotheses based upon these findings: (H1) agency workers and permanent workers that work with temporary workers will report lower levels of perceived job security compared to permanent workers that do not work with temporary workers, (H2.) agency workers and permanent workers that work with temporary workers will report lower levels of organisational commitment compared to permanent workers that do not work with temporary workers, and (H3.) autonomy will strongly correlate with levels of job satisfaction and organisational commitment for the two groups of permanent workers in the sample, but not for the agency workers group.

The present study placed an initial 106 participants into one of three groups: Agency workers, Permanent workers that work with temporary workers, and Permanent workers that don't work with temporary workers. A 45-item questionnaire was distributed to each of the participants containing the variables of 'Relations with co-workers', 'Relations with supervisor', 'Relations with organisation', 'Job satisfaction', 'Perceived job security', 'Autonomy', 'Skill variety', and 'Organisational commitment'. After collecting and analysing the responses using one-way ANOVA, independent t-tests, and correlation analyses, findings supported the first hypothesis, failed to support the second hypothesis, and partially supported the third hypothesis.

The results of the study suggested perceptions of job security were lower for agency workers and permanent workers that work with temporary workers, and although findings from the two groups stemmed from the same variable, the consequences could be regarded as different for each group. If an organisation's use of agency workers benefits the pre-existing workforce, the findings suggested that informing the permanent workers such reasons would reduce the negative impact that the agency workers may have. Comparing the groups in relation to the variable of organisational commitment failed to find any significant differences, suggesting that agency workers possessed the same levels of organisational commitment that permanent workers possess. Partial support of the third hypothesis resulted from findings that were not fully expected. By analysing the correlations between autonomy and the two variables of job satisfaction and organisational commitment, findings indicate that, although agency workers may not view autonomy as importantly as permanent workers, levels of autonomy may still have a significant impact on the individual's feelings towards the job.

Generalising temporary employment without accounting for different categories can lead to confusion that would not exist if groups of temporary workers were correctly separated, classified, and studied, as enough variety exists within each subsection already. Cultural factors also play a role in research, as an individual employed on a temporary basis in one country cannot be easily compared to an individual from another without taking into account potential differences that are likely to exist between the two. Motives that lead individuals into temporary employment can also vary significantly, as perceived levels of flexibility can prove a major attraction. However, if such flexibility does exist, it comes at a price, as the precarious nature of the triangular contract appears to favour the organisation. Findings from the present study indicate that even if individuals are aware of the risks, they can still feel harshly treated, as agency workers expecting the same treatment afforded to

permanent workers can find their treatment inadequate. The study also indicated how an organisation's use of agency workers could lead to a negative impact on the pre-existing permanent workers that could, in turn, have a knock on effect for agency workers.

Limitations of the research included the restricted nature of survey-based enquiry into the agency employment industry, the difficulty of applying identical methods to different worker groups, and the absence of longitudinal investigation. The need for further research into the Agency Workers Directive was identified, as was the need for greater investigation into the influence that motives have upon the psychological variables of agency workers.

APPENDIX B: EXTRACTS FROM THE RESEARCHER'S DIARY

Included below are a variety of extracts from a several assignments I worked in during my time as an agency worker. I have withheld the names of the temporary employment agencies and third party employers. The limited nature of the thesis's word count prevented me from including the majority of these extracts, yet several interesting events and perceptions are recorded within. These assignments took place during my time as a PhD student (i.e. 1/12/07-1/8/11).

Bishops Stortford Assignment

I was rung by the employment agency and asked if I could work the next day, and after replying that I could, I was told I needed to complete security and health and safety training lasting approximately 2-3 hours on that day (15th). The company I'd be working for was a major international courier service.

I stopped at the agency on the way to the third party employer and signed a contract, provided banking details, and collected a time sheet. I was given a brief run through of what the work would include. The initial assignment was open-ended, and would take place every Friday from 6pm to 4am. I would be starting at the same time as another new agency worker from the temporary employment agency, called Ivan.

I carried out my security training on the Thursday. It involved a test on a computer lasting two hours, and concluded with a 20-question assessment at the end. The test consisted of a programme that ran through several modules, and was presented on the screen with a voice reading out what was written. I was told I needed to score 100%, and that if this was not achieved, I would need to go back and look at areas again. The test was difficult, as I was bombarded with facts, figures, legislative development, procedures about airport security, and the company's methods of operation for 2 hours straight. This was made considerably more difficult due to the fact that I took the test in the manager's small, yet busy office with lots of noise and employees regularly coming in to talk to the manager. I succeeded in passing the assessment first time with a score of 100%, and was told this happened rarely. I was then asked by the manager what I was currently doing, and I explained I was nearing the end of a PhD in Occupational Psychology, as well

as the subject of my thesis. I noticed a significant change in demeanour from the manager fairly quickly when she combined the test success with my educational situation, and she asked that if I noticed anything whilst down on the shop floor about improving operations, that I should go and see her. I was also asked how many more days I could do and was told about the possibility of a part-time 20-hour a week post, which felt odd considering I hadn't even completed basic training or even seen where I was going to be working. Prior to this comment, I felt fairly ignored by the staff, who probably regarded me as 'another temp', as I later found out the company relied frequently on agency workers. At the end of the training, I felt like I had been 'seen' through new eyes for the first time.

I arrived at the company just before 6pm and went to the manager's office again to begin my health and safety training. This involved about half an hour of verbal and written presentation carried out by the manager, and concluded with another assessment about what we'd just seen. I found this particularly beneficial as it allowed me to meet the other agency worker, called Ivan, who I'd be working with, and we carried out a brief chat about our situations with the agency and the kind of work we'd done as agency workers. I felt happier in the knowledge that I'd be working along with another agency worker in the same situation, and the common ground we shared made the initial contact with the client company easier. Ivan was also from the same agency I had been placed by. We stole a brief chat whilst the manager was preparing the presentation and he told me his situation. His wife was a supply teacher, who had joined a teaching agency in the hope of getting work, and between them, Ivan joked that they may be able to make enough money to keep their house... for this year. Ivan was clearly intent on making a good impression, as he demonstrated constant interest and asked regular questions of other staff regarding the company and their procedures.

Once the training was completed, we were led down by the manager to the factory floor where we were introduced to a line manager who would be looking after us during our shift. We were given a brief tour before being placed in a couple of positions and told what to do for now. The aim was to collect deliveries from parcels around the UK and process them, before preparing them to fly out of the UK. The first hour or so was a baptism of fire, as deliveries came thick and fast and I was left to process a large and constant supply of parcels by placing them through an x-ray scan. Although the task was simple, it demanded speed and physical exertion that was difficult at the early stage of the work. After an hour the work slowed sufficiently to be shown some more methods by workers, although most kept out of our way.

Within a couple of hours of the start of my shift, the majority of workers finished, leaving around 7 or 8 who stayed on my shift till the end. The workload also slowed considerably, and throughout the shift, large portions of time were spent with nothing to do. The other workers commented that it was unusually quiet, but when deliveries did come through or needed to be collected, the pace sped up to a hectic rate again. In the quiet times, the permanent workers would tend to relax and play about, although the agency workers were asked to keep busy tidying the factory, which was in pretty good condition. This meant large portions of time spent looking for rubbish to pick up, although pieces were few and far between. The permanent workers understandably spent this time doing very little, but as agency workers me, Ivan, and one other agency worker tried to keep busy, or at least look like we were busy, which was difficult to achieve after our initial tidy up had been completed. One method I used to look busy would be to keep hold of larger pieces of rubbish I'd found instead of putting them in the nearest bin as logic would dictate. This meant that when walking around, it was evident what I was doing and that I was busy, yet in actual fact, I had very little to do. I even commented once to Ivan that I wish there was more rubbish around just to give us something to do, which he agreed with.

Towards the end of the shift when it was quiet again, I spoke to the third agency worker, who was from Spain. We shared the same employment agency, although he took part in considerably more shifts at the company we were in, as well as another set of shifts at a nearby company doing the same work. He described how this enabled him to do considerably more hours a week, which amounted to around 12 hours a day, 6 days a week. He mentioned how good the pay was, which if equivalent to mine, worked out at £7.50 an hour, although shift times were often at unsociable hours, with our present shift scheduled to finish at around 4am that morning. Despite what he regarded as the benefits of the amount of work he undertook, he also mentioned how difficult the amount of work was, and that he felt the need to take a break for the sake of his health. Whilst large chunks of the shift were spent doing very little, sizeable chunks were also spent working at high tempo with the constant lifting of heavy packages. Having just worked one shift under these conditions, I understood to some extent his concerns about the regular undertaking of such work for 12 hours a day, 6 days a week, and wondered if this would be possible under normal, non-agency based employment arrangements.

Work in the factory could be broadly divided into manual labour and automatic labour, yet the automatic labour required licenses and training that unsurprisingly only the permanent workers possessed. Whilst agency workers were left to

manually sort the packages and load them out of the large metal cages and on to that conveyor belts which led to x-rays, the permanent workers would rotate on the x-ray machines and scan what we were loading, whilst other permanent workers who helped with the loading would focus on the very heavy packages and loads that required the use of a forklift truck. This set up was unavoidable, as forklift driving licenses were required for the forklift and training and the following of strict guidelines was a requirement of the x-ray scanning, in which rules dictated that whoever scanned the packages must remain seated at all times, and could only work 20 minutes 'on' before spending 40 minutes 'off'. Whilst unavoidable, these forms of working increased the segregation of the agency and permanent staff. This segregation extended to break times, as the permanent workers would carry out their conversations whilst effectively ignoring the presence of the three agency workers, despite the small canteen area.

"You get all the great jobs" – Said to me by a permanent worker as he walked past me during a particularly laborious job involving the scanning of hundred of invoices.

In the assignments I worked in, we were given passes as a form of identification. Without fail, our passes always pointed out, in bold capital letters much bigger than our names, the terms 'TEMP' or 'AGENCY'. To me, this cemented the idea that, to the company and its permanent employees, this was the only form of identification that really mattered, certainly more so than our names, essentially branding us lower down from the permanent staff of the company, even when they were doing identical work. Passes were expected to be worn at all times.

I am unsurprised that even relatively small scale studies describe such a wide range of motivations for individuals involved in agency work, as the small number of individuals I encountered whilst on assignment included a massive variety of motivations, and agency working was believed by many of the individuals to be the answer to their situations.

The assignments I experienced were often low-skilled, yet the agency workers sharing the assignment were from a wide variety of backgrounds, ages, ethnicities, nationalities, classes, and educations.

In my experience, the agencies that were more likely to agree to be interviewed tended to be larger agencies with more formal and pre-defined procedures of working. Several agencies described how the temporary employment industry included agencies that they considered unscrupulous, but argued that they tended

smaller and independent. Larger chains like Adecco, Reed, and Manpower would undoubtedly find it far harder to mistreat candidates due to their size and exposure, but due to their secure financial foundations, such mistreatment would have less chance of occurring anyway.

In my experience, turning down assignments would often mean I wouldn't receive another call from the agency for a while, if at all, yet when I became far more prepared to say yes to anything, calls undoubtedly came more frequently.

Stansted Assignment

Agency work can often place individuals from very different backgrounds side by side in the same job, and my experience in this assignment strengthened that perception. Middle class English students like me worked side by side with migrant workers from several nationalities. The work was incredibly difficult physically, but required little mental engagement, yet even this highlighted the differences between workers, most notably in language. One of my Spanish colleagues spoke no English at all, and we needed to teach him the English for the word 'under', as this was the only verbal instruction he needed to give during the work. Other migrant workers were able to speak English fairly well, yet placing them in a formal interviewing process would have been difficult, as words that I would need to use, e.g. 'organisational commitment', 'perceived job security' etc, would have been difficult to put across. Despite this, I conversed as best I could and gathered a significant proportion of data. One such example occurred when I caught up with another Spanish migrant worker in this job. Having previously worked with him in similar work for the same agency at another assignment, I was able to re-address some of the concerns he voiced in our previous meetings. Despite simultaneously working for the same agency and the same third party employer, albeit in two different locations, for a considerable number of hours a week, i.e. 60-70 hours, he never received any kind of overtime pay. This struck me as unfair, as the agency and employing company were aware they could use a well-trained and hard working individual for an extensive number of hours and not need to worry about paying extra for the long periods of time he was committing to both of them.

Thaxted Assignment

One feature of the assignment was a reliance on the conveyor belt-based machinery on the shop floor. Whilst the permanent staff took part in the processes requiring a higher level of skill (usually involving the operation of the machinery), the

agency staff were left to do the unskilled processes of the job (e.g. constantly placing containers onto the moving belt). Because of the reliance on machinery, when it broke down, as it did frequently, production totally halted whilst the machinery was fixed by a couple of the most skilled permanent workers. Whilst the remaining permanent staff took the time to talk, relax, and get refreshments, there appeared to be an underlying desire to 'get their money's worth' from the agency workers. This meant that the agency staff were asked to do any tasks possible to keep them busy, from sweeping the floor to making large numbers of cardboard boxes used to package the product. Such work was only required up to a certain point, yet the agency workers were expected to constantly carry out these tasks until the machinery was fixed. In the case of the construction of cardboard boxes, the numbers grew to excessive amounts that clearly weren't required, but the management clearly preferred this to the alternative of letting the agency workers relax on the clock, as the permanent staff were.

Thaxted Assignment (Extra Note)

After a few days in the job, I realised the work was not for me, as it required 8 hour shifts, often spent in the same spot, with no human contact, placing contained on a conveyor belt of folding boxes. The monotony and isolation was difficult to handle. Despite this, I felt obligated (although I wasn't contractually) to complete two weeks of the assignment, as my recruitment consultant had requested when I first saw him. On completion of the two weeks, I requested any other assignments they had, but refused to work at the assignment I had just finished. Despite this, I received a call from the agency shortly after asking me to go back there. Despite expressing strong doubts based on my previous experiences at the company, I eventually accepted after a great deal of persuasion from the agency, who stated that they were in a difficult spot and I needed their help. Despite the acceptance, I was dreading the assignment, and this, coupled with my anxiety, resulted in me missing the work through illness. After informing them of this, the agency never called me again.

Cambridge Assignment

The phone rang in our office, which was entirely populated with around ten agency workers at the time. Our team leader answered the phone, and when the individual on the other end of the line realised they had rang a wrong number and asked for more information that our team leader clearly did not possess, our team leader answered with: "Sorry, we're all just a bunch of temps". This statement was clearly meant as a way of saying that he didn't know the company well enough to help with

information, and a lack of company specific knowledge is undoubtedly a common occurrence for agency workers. The statement felt like the equivalent of saying “Sorry, I’m new here”.

The role of our team, which ranged in number from 10-13 over the course of the assignment, was to mark around 40,000 maths and science papers, which had been distributed to educational establishments all over the world. Once completed by the students, these exam papers were then sent back to our company’s base, where they were electronically scanned and sent through to us to mark. In our second week, I and my group of agency workers, who were focussing upon maths exam papers, ran out of papers to mark in the morning. This shortage lasted until the following day, and whilst we were told it was predominantly due to the volcanic eruptions grounding flights, the fact that we had marked at a relatively quick rate meant ensured the lack of papers. We were told to wait around for about an hour whilst they decided what to do, and that they would call back with instructions. On hearing the phone ring with the news somebody jokingly said “We’re going to get fired!”, and in relation to the rest of that day (5 hours before we were scheduled to finish), this was what happened. We were sent home, having been told we would only be paid up until 12pm that day, and not 5pm as usual. This was highly frustrating, as it became clear that if we’d worked at a slower pace in the days running up to it, and therefore marked fewer papers, we would have received a full-days pay. We had essentially been punished with less pay for working incredibly hard. From then on, we kept a careful watch on the number of papers we marked to ensure that the assignment remained consistent, and that we would have work, and therefore pay, up until the predefined end of the assignment, which had been stipulated in our contracts. Without doubt, the above experience manifested itself as a perception of job insecurity, as we knew that, due to our status as agency workers, the company were well within their right to ask us to leave with no pay. – Can you think of any employment situation where you are so easily penalized for a higher level of performance than was expected by your employers?

At one point in the assignment, a permanent worker joined the team to help with the workload, and out of the dozen or so workers, he possessed internet access, something which no agency workers had. This meant that many people would gather round his computer during breaks and quiet period to surf the internet, or to watch others do so.

Despite a relatively large group ranging from 10-13 throughout the assignment, we only possessed one pass that would operate the door between us. This led to the rather odd situation of having to be asked to be let out. Workers took different length lunch breaks at different times in the day, and sometimes finished work early after taking a shorter lunch, so we needed to constantly make sure that someone was in the office at all times to ensure workers arriving back from their breaks at different times were able to access the office to begin work.

Many of the 13 agency workers I worked with mentioned that they would be seeking other assignments through our agency immediately after this assignment finished, and as most other assignments required fewer workers, it occurred to me that if I wanted further employment with that particular agency, I was likely to be in fierce competition with the other agency workers I had befriended.

For some agencies, there can undoubtedly be a clear reliance on the income of one or two client companies, as a disproportionate number of the agency staff on their books may be assigned to that same organisation. I found this to be the case with two separate agencies. With one agency, I was sent to two industrial sites owned by the same company, whilst another agency sent me to two admin-based sites owned by the same company. Also, with each agency, the only work I was offered over the time I was signed with them was for the two organisations. It became clear that in both cases, the organisation represented a major client for the agency, and accounted for a large proportion of their income. One clear outcome on such reliance was the increased importance on the part of the agency to meet the requirements of the organisation whenever possible. Whilst the organisations possessed a large stake in the performance of the agency, individual agency workers represented relatively minor significance to the agency. When such disparity exists, it could be argued that if any dispute between the organisation and the agency worker surfaces, the agency will almost certainly side with the organisation.

Whilst working for two different agencies, I was sent to work with the same at two sites each with the same company, and I found from this and talking with the agencies that these were their main clients respectively. As a large proportion of the agencies' income relied on these clients' business, it is clear that, in a disagreement between a single agency worker and the TPE, the agency would almost certainly side with the TPE due to their importance to the business.

Stansted Airport Assignment

An excess in the amount of work existed, meaning that workers were asked by manager to stay on and help clear what was left. The agency workers working with me left at the allotted time despite the request to stay, as they had no obligation to work beyond the hours agreed with the agency. I decided to stay a little longer to help finish the job I had began, which was met with surprise from the permanent members of staff, who by then knew I was agency.

APPENDIX C: QUESTION SCRIPTS

Included below are the four main questions scripts that were used in interviews with agency workers, permanent workers, temporary employment agencies, and third party employers respectively:

Agency Worker Question-Script

Introduction

How long have you been working as an agency worker?

How many separate assignments have you worked on behalf of your temporary employment agency?

Have you always been employed by one employment agency, and are you signed to any others?

How long does your average assignment usually last?

Why you are in an agency-worker role? What are the reasons e.g. flexible hours, variety, stepping stone for permanent work, tight labour market, self-improvement etc.

Job Satisfaction

Generally speaking, how happy are you with your job?

In your experience, have you found your co-workers to be happy with their jobs?

Have you experienced a difference in levels of satisfaction between permanent and agency workers doing similar work?

Would you be more satisfied in an equivalent, but permanent job?

If you left your current job, would you look for another temporary position, or something more permanent?

Do you see yourself as an agency worker in the long term?

Autonomy

To what extent does your job let you decide on your own how to go about doing things at work?

To what extent do you feel you should be entitled to more independence and freedom in how you do your work?

Are there occasions when you feel you are denied the chance to use personal initiative or judgement in carrying out your work?

Organisational Commitment

Do you feel part of the organisation?

Would you recommend to a close friend that they join the employing organisation you work for?

If you found that your work had made a long term benefit to the organisation, how would this make you feel?

Would the offer of a bit more money from another employer make you consider changing your job:

From a temporary employment agency?

From another organisation (assignment)?

In your work, do you feel you are making some effort not just for yourself, but for the organisation as well?

Do you feel a greater degree of commitment to your temporary employment agency, or the organisation that employ you?

Why do you say this (in relation to the above question)?

If you found the organisation you were working for was struggling financially, would you look for alternative employment?

Job Security

To what extent do you feel secure in your job:

With your current assignment?

With your temporary employment agency?

In your role as an agency worker (going from assignment to assignment and always having an assignment to go to)

Do you feel you will be able to keep your current job as long as you want:

With you current organisation?

With your employment agency?

Have you felt less secure in your job since the financial economic crisis of 2008/09 began?

As an agency worker, do you feel more vulnerable compared to permanent workers?

Do you feel a greater degree of flexibility as an agency worker?

If so, do you think you have forfeited a degree of security?

Perceived Organisational Support

Do you feel that your employment agency considered your goals and values when pairing you with an assignment?

Do you think your skills and abilities were effectively assessed by your employment agency?

How do you think your agency would react if you had a long absence due to illness?

If you had a complaint, who would you feel safest approaching?

If you made a complaint, do you believe it would be treated differently because of your employment status:

By your current organisation?

By your employment agency?

Do you feel you have been well supported when you have had a problem:

By your current organisation?

By your employment agency?

Can you give examples (to the above question)

Do you think that your levels of happiness are taken seriously:

By your current organisation?

By your employment agency?

Do you believe your temporary employment agency will always find you work?

Do you feel your efforts on assignment are recognised and appreciated by your temporary employment agency?

Have you ever felt you have been taken advantage of in your current employment, and if so, did you think your employment status affected this?

If you were unable to finish a task on time, do you think the employing organisation would understand?

Do you think that your employment agency will find you the best possible job you are qualified for?

Do you believe that your employment agency will find you better assignments based on improved effort from you in previous assignments?

Worker Relations

Do you encounter other agency workers in your present job? How do you get on with them?

Do you feel that your status as an agency worker impacts upon the perceptions that permanent workers have of you?

Do you feel valued and respected by the supervisor of your current assignment? Do you feel your status affects this?

In your personal experience, do you feel your current employing organisation values permanent workers above agency workers?

Do you feel any difference in treatment could be justified?

Agency Workers Directive

Are you familiar with the proposed Agency Workers Directive? (Briefly explain if not)

As an agency worker, do you feel these are changes that should be implemented?

Would you find the role of an agency worker more attractive if these changes were in place?

Do you feel threatened by the potential reduction in demand for agency workers that the Directive may lead to?

General

Have you ever experienced any kind of discrimination that you attributed to your position as an agency worker?

Do you feel you are taken for granted as a result of your agency worker status by the third party employer?

Do you see yourself working as an agency worker for the foreseeable future?

Permanent Worker Question-Script

Introduction

How long have you been working for your current employer?

To what degree does your company rely upon agency staff?

Job Satisfaction

Generally speaking, how happy are you with your job?

In your experience, have you found your co-workers to be happy with their jobs?

Have you experienced a difference in levels of satisfaction between permanent and agency workers doing similar work?

Have you ever perceived your job satisfaction to be altered by the company's use of agency workers? Has this been the case for any of your permanent colleagues?

Autonomy

To what extent does your job let you decide on your own how to go about doing things at work?

To what extent do you feel you should be entitled to more independence and freedom in how you do your work?

Do you feel you are denied the chance to use personal initiative or judgement in carrying out the work? Do you feel you are given more freedom in this respect than agency workers?

Organisational Commitment

Do you feel part of the organisation?

Would you recommend to a close friend that they join the employing organisation you work for?

If you found that your work had made a long term benefit to the organisation, how would this make you feel?

Would the offer of a bit more money from another employer make you consider changing your job to another organisation?

In your work, do you feel you are making some effort not just for yourself, but for the organisation as well?

If you found the organisation you were working for were struggling financially, would you look for alternative employment?

Do you think your level of commitment has been affected by your company's use of agency workers?

Job Security

To what extent do you feel secure in your job?

Do you feel you will be able to keep your current job as long as you want with your current organisation?

Have you felt less secure in your job since the financial economic crisis of 2008/09 began?

Agency Worker Interaction

Have you ever perceived your job to be threatened by the employment of agency workers?

How would you perceive an increase in your company's usage of agency workers? What would you attribute this change to?

Do you envy the potentially higher level of freedom that agency workers may enjoy?

Have you witnessed your employer hiring a former agency worker on a permanent basis? If so, how did that make you feel?

What do you think your employer's motives are when they bring in agency workers?

Do you feel the inclusion of agency workers has benefited your workforce?

Do you believe the recent financial difficulties will alter your employer's use of agency staff?

Agency Workers Directive

Are you familiar with the proposed Agency Workers Directive? (Briefly explain if not)

What are your initial thoughts about the adoption of the Directive?

Do you feel that agency workers deserve an improvement to the aspects of their contract that the Directive addresses?

Do you expect your employer to change their employment practices in light of this Directive?

Temporary Employment Agency Question-Script

Introduction

Roughly how many agency workers do you currently have on your books?

What qualities do you feel have served your agency best in this field?

Agency Worker

What motives do individuals have in becoming agency workers in your experience?

Do you feel that agency employment fits these motives well?

In your experience, are agency workers typically satisfied with their jobs?

Do you think employment as an agency worker has a long term beneficial effect upon their future employment?

Do you find that the agency workers on your books often sign up to multiple employment agencies?

Would this have any implications when you are looking for possible assignments on their behalf?

When taking on board possible agency workers, what are the qualities you look for, and how do you assess these qualities?

Have you experienced negative treatment towards agency workers from companies as a result of their employment status? Have individuals complained of mistreatment?

What steps would you be able to take if any such mistreatment took place?

Do you feel that agency workers have access to an appropriate level of job security? Do they forfeit security for flexibility? If so, is this a fair trade?

What are the typical grievances that agency workers have in your experience?

Research has suggested that agency work can help vulnerable groups into employment. Would you agree? Have you experienced this?

Do you perceive the role of employment agencies as an important one in getting individuals into employment in the current financial situation? Has this importance increased since the recession?

Trade Union Interaction

Do you feel that agency workers have acceptable access to trade-union support? Do they need it?

Have you had any contact with trade unions regarding your agency worker staff?

Do the agency workers on your books know about, or pursue, trade unions support?
Are the levels of awareness acceptable?

What avenues of support can you offer agency workers? Do you find agency workers seek help and support? Would this increase with heightened awareness of trade union help?

Third Party Employer Interaction

Do you have any guidelines that potential clients must adhere to before obtaining access to the agency workers on your books?

Do you ever have to check potential clients to assess their suitability for employing agency workers?

In your experience, do client firms treat agency workers any differently to their permanent staff?

Do you rely on the same client companies on a regular basis, or attracting new clients?

Do you find it important to cultivate a good working relationship with companies looking to employ agency workers?

How often do agency workers join the third party employer as a permanent worker? If so, how does this affect your relationship with your client?

As an employment agency you have a responsibility to supply work to the individual agency worker, as well as a service to the client. Have you ever experienced a situation with conflicting allegiances?

Is there a difference in the levels of commitment you feel towards the employing organisation and the individual agency worker?

When assessing an agency worker's suitability for an assignment, how do you match the individual with the placement? Do you receive much feedback from the client?

Have you ever had any contact with permanent workers from your client firms in relation to assessing the company's suitability?

Agency Workers Directive

The Agency Workers Directive is set to take effect in the UK in 2009. What are the major implications:

For temporary employment agencies?

For individual agency workers?

For trade unions?

How much influence do you believe trade unions had in the proposal of the Directive?

Do you believe that the Directive will have a positive impact upon individual agency workers?

How do you think companies that utilise agency workers will react to the Directive's implementation?

Do you think the Directive may cut back on the number of opportunities available to agency workers?

How do you think the Directive will affect agency workers looking to become permanent workers? i.e. increased training, easier to join third party employer etc

Third Party Employer Question-Script

Introduction

Roughly how many agency workers do you currently have on your books?

Agency Worker

What motives do individuals have in becoming agency workers in your experience?

Do you feel that agency employment fits these motives well?

In your experience, are agency workers typically satisfied with their jobs?

Do you rely on one temporary employment agency for staff, or several?

When taking on board possible agency workers, what are the qualities you look for, and how do you assess these qualities?

Have you witnessed negative treatment towards agency workers as a result of their employment status? Have individuals complained of mistreatment?

What steps would you be able to take if any such mistreatment took place?

Do you feel that agency workers have access to an appropriate level of job security? Do they forfeit security for flexibility? If so, is this a fair trade?

What are the typical grievances that agency workers have in your experience, and how do they differ from your permanent workers?

Research has suggested that agency work can help vulnerable groups into employment. Would you agree? Have you experienced this?

Do you perceive the role of employment agencies as an important one in getting individuals into employment in the current financial situation? Has this importance increased since the recession?

Do you offer training opportunities to agency workers? Do these opportunities differ significantly from those offered to permanent workers?

Do the frequency or types of reward differ dependent upon whether a worker is permanent or an agency worker?

Trade Union Interaction

Do you feel that agency workers have acceptable access to trade-union support? Do they need it?

Have you had any contact with trade unions regarding your agency worker staff?

Do the agency workers in your organisation know about, or pursue, trade unions support? Are the levels of awareness acceptable?

What avenues of support can you offer agency workers? Do you find agency workers seek help and support? Would this increase with heightened awareness of trade union help?

Temporary Employment Agency Interaction

Do you ever have to check potential clients to assess their suitability prior to employing agency workers from them?

Are there any particular guidelines set by the employment agency you need to adhere to before being allowed access to agency workers?

Do you rely on the same temporary employment agencies on a regular basis, or do you approach other agencies?

Do you find it important to cultivate a good working relationship with temporary employment agencies looking to employ agency workers?

How often do agency workers join you as a permanent worker? If so, how does this affect your relationship with the temporary employment agency?

When receiving an agency worker from an agency, do you offer much feedback to the agency regarding their performance?

Have you ever had any contact with permanent workers from your organisation in relation to their reaction to agency workers that you have employed?

Agency Workers Directive

Are you familiar with the proposed Agency Workers Directive? (Briefly explain if not)

The Agency Workers Directive is set to take effect in the UK in 2009. What are the major implications for organisation like yours that utilise agency workers?

How much influence do you believe trade unions had in the proposal of the Directive?

Do you believe that the Directive will have a positive impact upon individual agency workers?

Do you think the Directive may cut back on the number of opportunities available to agency workers?

Do you think your organisation will be able to meet the increased demands made by the Agency Workers Directive?

Will you consider changing your employment practices in light of the changes outlined on the Agency Workers Directive? Would any changes be voluntary?

How do you think the Directive will affect agency workers looking to become permanent workers? i.e. increased training, easier to join third party employer, etc

APPENDIX D: TABLE OF CODING

Code #	Code Name	Sources	Refs	Broad Category
1	Tenure of Current/Most Recent Assignment	8	8	Statistics
2	Number of Assignments	8	9	Statistics
3	Number of TEA's signed with	13	14	Statistics
4	Average Tenure of Assignments	3	4	Statistics
5	Tenure of Current/Most Recent Job	4	5	Statistics
6	Degree of Company Reliance on Agency Staff	4	4	Statistics
7	Number of Agency Workers on Books	6	6	Statistics
8	Number of TEA's used by TPE	2	2	Statistics
9	Just for the Money	7	14	Motives for Agency Work
10	Experience/Future Employment Prospects	11	12	Motives for Agency Work
11	Stopgap	7	12	Motives for Agency Work
12	Stepping Stone into Permanent Role/Temp-to-Perm Transition	13	17	Motives for Agency Work
13	Redundancy	5	5	Motives for Agency Work
14	Flexibility	13	29	Motives for Agency Work
15	No Choice	3	4	Motives for Agency Work
16	Does Agency Work Fit these Motives?	12	13	Motives for Agency Work
17	Motives of Organisation's use of Agency Workers	8	10	Motives for Agency Work
18	Prefer a Permanent Role – Yes	8	12	Motives for Agency Work
19	Prefer a Permanent Role – No	4	5	Motives for Agency Work
20	Agency Does the Work	4	5	Motives for Agency Work

21	Job Satisfaction as Agency Worker	10	13	Job Satisfaction
22	Job Satisfaction as Permanent Worker	4	5	Job Satisfaction
23	Co-Worker Satisfaction	12	13	Job Satisfaction
24	Comparisons between Worker Groups – Job Satisfaction	10	12	Job Satisfaction
25	Effect of Company Usage of Agency Workers on Job Satisfaction	4	5	Job Satisfaction
26	Are Agency Workers Satisfied?	8	8	Job Satisfaction
27	Commitment to the TEA	7	11	Organisational Commitment
28	Commitment to the TPE – Agency Worker	12	28	Organisational Commitment
29	Commitment to the TPE – Permanent Worker	4	8	Organisational Commitment
30	Comparing TEA and TPE – Organisational Commitment	8	9	Organisational Commitment
31	Difference in TEA commitment to Agency Worker and TPE	5	7	Organisational Commitment
32	Effect of Company Usage of Agency Workers on Org Com	11	14	Organisational Commitment
33	Effect of Tenure	4	7	Organisational Commitment
34	Secure in your Job?	13	20	Job Security
35	Vulnerable in your Job	17	41	Job Security
36	Will you keep your Current Job?	10	13	Job Security
37	Job Security Forfeited?	17	22	Job Security
38	Comparing POV of AW on TEA and TPE - Job Security	2	2	Job Security
39	Informed Consent	11	18	Job Security
40	Recognition of Efforts	3	6	Perceived Organisational Support
41	Level of Happiness taken seriously by TEA	5	5	Perceived Organisational Support
42	Level of Happiness taken seriously by TPE	7	7	Perceived Organisational Support

43	Support from TEA	13	36	Perceived Organisational Support
44	Support from TPE	9	16	Perceived Organisational Support
45	Feel safer approaching with a complaint – TEA or TPE?	8	8	Perceived Organisational Support
46	TPE Values PW's above AW's	8	15	Perceived Organisational Support
47	Should changes be Implemented?	5	5	Agency Workers Directive
48	Role of Agency Worker more Attractive?	10	12	Agency Workers Directive
49	Threatened by Potential Reduction in Demand?	15	18	Agency Workers Directive
50	Are these Changes Deserved?	3	3	Agency Workers Directive
51	Initial Thoughts of the Directive	12	12	Agency Workers Directive
52	Change in Employment Practices of Company due to Directive	12	19	Agency Workers Directive
53	Main Implications for Agency Workers from AWD	12	12	Agency Workers Directive
54	Main Implications for Organisations	11	18	Agency Workers Directive
55	AWD Effect on Temp-to-Perm Transition	7	10	Agency Workers Directive
56	Permanent Worker Reaction to the AWD	4	4	Agency Workers Directive
57	Job Threatened by Agency Worker Employment	6	7	Agency Worker Interaction with Permanent Workers
58	Perception of Agency Worker Increase	5	8	Agency Worker Interaction with Permanent Workers
59	Envious of Agency Worker Freedom	5	6	Agency Worker Interaction with Permanent Workers
60	Perception of Temp-to-Perm Transition	5	6	Agency Worker Interaction with Permanent Workers
61	"Us and Them Mentality"	7	13	Agency Worker Interaction with Permanent Workers
62	Permanent Workers took control of the Agency Workers	5	7	Agency Worker Interaction with Permanent Workers

63	Agency Worker Integration	13	25	Agency Worker Interaction with Permanent Workers
64	Impact of Financial Crisis on TPE's Use of Agency Workers	4	4	Agency Worker Interaction with TPE
65	Fellow Agency Worker Interaction	6	6	Agency Worker Interaction with TPE
66	Agency Workers Benefitted Workforce?	5	8	Agency Worker Interaction with TPE
67	Support offered to Agency Workers	5	5	Agency Worker Interaction with TPE
68	Typical Grievances/Complaints of Agency Workers	5	5	Agency Worker Interaction with TPE
69	Autonomy at Work	12	13	Agency Worker Interaction with TPE
70	Rewards	4	4	Agency Worker Interaction with TPE
71	Feedback	11	11	Agency Worker Interaction with TPE
72	Training	10	12	Agency Worker Interaction with TPE
73	Difference in Treatment due to Employment Status	20	76	Agency Worker Interaction with TPE
74	Agency Workers are Unreliable	7	11	Agency Worker Interaction with TPE
75	Qualities looked for in Agency Workers, and Assessment of these	2	3	Agency Worker Interaction with TPE
76	Consideration of Goals and Values	8	9	Agency Worker Interaction with TEA
77	Assessment of Skills and Abilities	13	13	Agency Worker Interaction with TEA
78	Effect of Signing to Multiple Agencies	7	7	Agency Worker Interaction with TEA

79	Agency Work Helps Vulnerable Groups	7	8	Agency Worker Interaction with TEA
80	The Role of TEA's in finding Employment for Individuals	11	21	Agency Worker Interaction with TEA
81	Qualities looked for in Agency Workers, and Assessment of these	4	5	Agency Worker Interaction with TEA
82	Qualities that have served the Agency Best	4	4	Agency Worker Interaction with TEA
83	Future Employment	8	24	Agency Worker Interaction with TEA
84	Appreciation of Efforts	7	10	Agency Worker Interaction with TEA
85	TEA-TPE Relationship	7	19	TEA Interaction with TPE
86	Assessing TPE/TEA Suitability	7	10	TEA Interaction with TPE
87	Rely on Same Clients or New Business?	5	5	TEA Interaction with TPE
88	Effect of Temp-to-Perm Transition	5	8	TEA Interaction with TPE

APPENDIX E: A CODED INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Included below is an interview transcript that has been thematically coded using the coding table above. The participant was a recruitment consultant from a temporary employment agency, which meant that many of the codes did not apply to his answers.

Researcher: ok so roughly how many agency workers do you currently have on your books?

Interviewee: erm, around about ninety-four

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Researcher: ok and are they all on assignments?

Interviewee: that's all the people working yeah

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Researcher: ok, is there a lot more on assignments?

Interviewee: yes, yeah round about, the system would say around 133 I'd say, erm, realistically you're going to be talking available people who are actually working who are on the books you're probably talking, a good 50% of those are on assignment but with other agencies

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Researcher: ok, so what qualities do you feel have served your agency best in this field?

Interviewee: we're not particularly 'salesy', don't repeat that to my manager, but we're not particularly 'salesy' we're more customer services orientated I'd say for, and it tends to suit the local market a bit more, some of the national, we've got branches around the UK and some of the other areas will, I feel, feel more receptive to a more 'salesy' approach, [name of city] less so in honesty so, we tend to just believe in customer service, we still do sales we market ourselves out there, but quite softly softly, and speed, maybe being quick off the mark because it is a pretty competitive market and there is quite a few, even after the post recession, shut down some of the agencies there's still competitors out there, and the same people will register with more than one agency so we have to be quick off the mark making sure will fill in the roles

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Researcher: ok so a question about the agency workers now, what motives do individuals have in becoming agency workers in your experience?

Interviewee: primarily people will be looking for permanent work, so it may well be they've finished their permanent role for whatever reason and looking for something to keep them ticking over, this time of year as well we get a lot of students in for the summer period, but the main reason would be, yeah probably relocation to be fair, is one of the main reasons yeah

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Researcher: ok so do you feel agency employment fits these motives well?

Interviewee: yeah I believe it does yeah

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Researcher: ok, in your experience are agency workers typically satisfied in their jobs?

Interviewee: ... it's got to vary realistically I mean some people end up doing things that are much more mundane to their permanent roles, but yeah as a rule of thumb people are satisfied, it's a very subjective term isn't it, 'satisfied with their work' well, yeah some, they're satisfied with getting paid for a period of time yeah, some as well

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Researcher: ok, so do you think employment as an agency worker has a long-term beneficial effect upon their future employment?

Interviewee: I think, I think it does, for two probably main reasons, one for maybe someone who was not particularly experienced it would be an even easier way of building up a range of experience of office-based its easier to get those kinds of positions that it is to leap straight into them on a permanent basis, cos companies will be a little bit more flexible, so say for example [name of company] if somewhere went into a role there without too much experience over six months then, or maybe just working over the summer holidays it may get them temping for six months or a year on top of that so they've actually got quite a solid experience of that on their c.v and it makes it very easy for them, perhaps make it easier for them to get a role within that organisation on a permanent basis or to get a straight permanent role with other companies, so I say it is definitely beneficial for people with less experience, people with more experience, it still is but probably less so but its probably better on the basis of how it looks on the c.v to still be working than it does to have a prolonged period of unemployment

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Researcher: ok, so do you find that the agency workers on your books often sign up to multiple employment agencies?

Interviewee: err I say most do yeah

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Researcher: ok and would this have any implications when you're looking for possible assignments on their behalf?

Interviewee: no it doesn't because I mean, we don't but we should, commercially, ask exactly where people have registered and what they are doing, but we do ask what they do if they get a role with another agency but we don't tend to ask on registration whether they're with any other agencies as such, but it wouldn't stop us

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position to take on permanent staff, so I think it does it is almost, not a buffer, but it almost offers a soft, opportunity for companies to grow without committing themselves financially much, and it probably benefits, I don't know which way you look at it but it benefits candidates because those opportunities are then there but then some people could then argue that if those temporary opportunities weren't there they'd be permanent roles, I suspect there would be but I suspect they'd be fewer

Researcher: ok so do you find, that's from a company's point of view...

Interviewee: ...yeah...

Researcher: ... but with individuals who have maybe been made redundant fairly recently do you think that agency work can help them get back into employment quickly?

Interviewee: yeah I think it helps, I mean we've had quite a few people recently in that exact situation being made redundant, come to use and we've had some of them who started, gonna start this Monday, very similar situation, got made redundant from their current role, went to come and temp for us, to be honest not in such an involved role, but have actually got a permanent role in the same organisation, at pretty much the same level, effectively at what they got made redundant at same salary anyway, so yeah it does help

Researcher: ok a little bit about third party employer interaction, do you have any guidelines that potential clients, companies have to adhere to before obtaining access to agency workers on your books?

Interviewee: we ask people whether they have any health and safety issues that we're required to, obviously by law, and we always try, well we always visit companies as well if they're a knew client we go down and see the site, meet people for two reasons, firstly, we want to make sure it looks safe and an appropriate environment, but also so we get a better feel for the environment we have a better feel for the people who are going to fit in there so when we speak to people about companies we can tell them a little bit more about the environment itself and also give meat on the bones about the job itself, so yeah that's what we aim for

Researcher: so you go there in person?

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quickly you can react, and how well you can actually, linked to relationship, but how well you really know that candidate and that company, and so you kind of, match them as close as possible and sometimes there's a bit more you know, about roles and "this is the job and all we've got, but we know the company you've been there before to you it would be something of interest" but sometimes it can be things that are a little bit more, erm, subjective I suppose, we have a better feel for maybe what a company looks for in terms of receptionists, some companies we know they'll look for certain backgrounds certain experience no, they're a range of people we know who could probably do the job and what their preference would be if we had say, half a dozen c.v's we know that maybe they'll maybe be two of those who are particular favourites and that how it kind of, yeah you only get that from really building up knowledge of a company and of candidates, over a period of time

Researcher: ok, do you find it important to cultivate a good working relationship with companies looking to employ agency workers?

Interviewee: absolutely yeah

Researcher: ok so is that integral to your business?

Interviewee: it is yeah

Researcher: ok, how often do agency workers join the third party employer as a permanent worker, and if they do, how does this affect your relationship with this employer?

Interviewee: in terms of temping through us and then they get another role with another company?

Researcher: if they'd been temping with you for a company and then that company they were with offers them a permanent role and takes them off your books, does that happen and if so, how does that affect your relationship?

Interviewee: it does, I mean it does happen, it's normally a positive thing, but we do have fees in place if someone did take someone on a permanent basis who was temping for us, within certain sorts of time spans depending on what's been negotiated, they would pay a fee, outside of those time spans there wouldn't be a fee, which is fine, the only time I suppose it would be detrimental is if you feel a company will take someone, and we have had it happen a couple of times to be fair, where someone would temp there and then the company would, say "we don't require the person anymore" but

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I'm doing", and you know it's positive feedback, whatever you happen to be, so yeah I think that would be beneficial

Researcher: ok, onto the topic of the agency workers directive, are you, are you familiar with the agency workers directive?

Interviewee: yeah its coming in, is it October next year

Researcher: ok, well the agency workers directive is set to take effect, what do you think the major implications are, firstly for temporary employment agencies like yourself

Interviewee: yeah, it's up in the air a little bit at the moment, everyone is having this out at head office to a certain extent, there I mean they'll be requirements that will put temporary staff on a par with permanent staff, now like everything pluses and minuses to it, minuses, it could make the workforce less flexible, and so it will make companies less able to cope with changes in the seasonal peaks and troughs, or, err, changes in the economy I guess, but pluses you could argue, candidates aren't going to be used in a position where they're just going to be ongoing temporary, instead of actually being given a permanent position to a company, I don't think it will change agencies, or badly hit agencies I should say, it'll probably change the way, they use temporary and permanent staff so, you'll probably find they'd be many more contracts, going on I suspect so, yeah if it's a role that's likely to be say, a six month temporary role, though to be fair, cost wise that will already be a disadvantage to a client, after three months it'll cost the client more to take that person on than it would to take them on a contract, but, nevertheless say it was over four weeks anyway, it's probably going to encourage companies to use contracts, contract roles, contracts rather than a temporary member of staff, so that'll change the way we distribute roles within the branch, but it doesn't actually change, that much about how we operate, maybe slightly with a few of the temps a larger band of contractors and they'll be placed permanently effectively in contract, and the perms team may benefit as well because they're slightly longer term roles even longer maybe, then they would look at a permanent position and be more inclined to take someone on a permanent role rather than just keep trickling things through, on a temp basis, I mean there's been a situation where we've had clients with projects where they're not sure how they've gonna be paying out, and then had people temp for, a couple of years, so I mean obviously in that instance the company will probably sit down with three lots of people, and see, realistically how they think it's going to progress and then perhaps

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have further recruitment policy in place whether they take someone on a contract or a permanent role, erm... potentially we could become more expensive, I suppose with the other thing as well is obviously if you're going to make salaries equivalent to the temporary and the permanent side, at the moment they're not I mean I'd say a temporary worker is probably paid slightly less than a permanent worker because of the agency's costs and VAT all the rest on top, so yeah I mean temporary employment would become a more expensive option for a company, erm, I suspect on the permanents in terms of the permanent employees, one of the down sides of permanent employees would be, we'll see the purging of benefits, benefits will just be, I imagine, done to the sword and a lot of, well pension schemes will be in trouble, they are already but I think a lot of extra benefits that will be stripped out of permanent workers so not necessarily all pushing permanent workers' benefits down rather than necessarily pull the agency worker benefits up, erm, but yeah, time will tell I guess

Researcher: ok, you mentioned the three month qualifying period, I mean with the agency workers on placement at the moment, would that be a large proportion of the workers who qualify?

Interviewee: most will be under three months to be honest, slightly guesstimating I'd say we've got about, mid-nineties, ninety-four is it and so probably twenty, fifteen maybe over a three months period, erm, so it would make a difference it wouldn't be major necessarily it all depends on what you consider is a break because some of those people would have had breaks, but whether, if it were for the same company but for two or three assignments with a couple of weeks break between those, whether that counts as continuous or not, I don't know at the moment, I don't know whether there's anything set

Researcher: ok you mentioned that obviously after say the three month period they need to sit down and decide what they're going to do, do you think that's kind of forcing their hand in a way and do you think that could be detrimental to the agency worker, if they may be cut short?

Interviewee: sometimes, sometimes it will be better and sometimes it will be detrimental I suppose, I mean if its, say for example they've employed people for two years I mean that will be beneficial I guess because the agency worker because they probably looked at it and said "It's certainly three months in its going to run for a foreseeable amount of time, we'll take the person on a permanent

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Researcher: ok, one more question actually, a lot of research suggests that companies bring in agency workers as a way of like, recruitment if you like...

Interviewee: ...yeah...

Researcher: you mentioned that you've got all these ways of assessing abilities, so if a company brings an agency worker in that you've assessed, they've got a much better idea than if they've run their own recruitment drive, so they may actually be getting agency workers purely as a way of making them permanent at some point, have you found that to be the case?

Interviewee: yeah I mean I think, I mean the thing is it depends what procedures and facilities companies have to actually assess candidates themselves but, we have a range, well obviously err, we can take things to a certain extent so we can do psychometric assessments and skills, but on top of that you get people temping who feel for, relationships again, people who are looking for, what they enjoy and what they don't like, and you talk to people over a period of time, and you get, you do get, either a bad feedback or hopefully some good feedback on candidates, so I think if I mean if someone goes into a role in a company and they're temping for a period of time we have a better feel for whether that is likely to work or not, now whether or not I'm just wishful thinking but I would be, I'd be confident I'd suspect I'd have a better chance of filling a role with someone who's temped for me a little bit and a company would just fill in the role with somebody they've just put an add in the paper and interviewed, and just took someone, I mean having, having said that, it does depend on the procedures companies put people through, loads of companies now do assessment days, including [name of agency], so I suppose I mean that does make it more, structured that just an interview which I think is just hopelessly, to be honest, unreliable, you get people who interview fantastically and are not very good at the role and vice versa, erm, I think also if companies actually take, the same company take on a temporary worker they have a period of time of where again, they're not actually having an interview for an hour maybe two interviews maybe three interviews, for maybe half a day, they actually see someone over a month maybe two-month period, they then have a better feel for whether that person is going to fit in the role, whether it's going to be something for where they've got something else they can talk to them as well, so I think, I think that's beneficial for the candidate as well, but to be fair obviously, they'd rather be a permanent worker I'm sure, but if a

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