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Tit for tat?: Predictors of temporary agency workers’ commitments

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Abstract

The temporary workforce is a small but increasing proportion of the labor market in most industrialized countries. It has been argued that the competitive advantage of temporary work agencies will be increasingly determined by their capacity to retain a committed workforce of temporary agency workers. Hence, we investigated temporary agency workers’ commitment to their client organization and also their temporary work agency. Normative and affective commitments were predicted by perceived organizational support (POS) in the case of both entities, supporting the idea that these types of commitment are governed by a social exchange relationship. Continuance commitment was not associated with POS or placement-related variables. Unexpectedly, agency temps’ commitments did not differ across the two entities. The results suggest that client organizations and temporary work agencies can each strive to achieve greater affective and normative commitments from agency temps, through POS-related activities, without compromising agency temps’ commitments to the other entity.

Key words: Contingent Workers, Dual Commitments, Organizational Commitment, Perceived Organizational Support, Temporary Workers, Temps
The growth of the temporary work industry is arguably one of the most influential employment trends of the last two decades (Connelly and Gallagher 2006; Walsh and Deery 2006). At the beginning of 2005, temporary agency workers (hereafter referred to as *agency temps*; also referred to in the literature as *contract workers*, *labour hire workers*, or *temporary help-service workers*) constituted 1.5 percent of total employment in the United States, comprising an estimated 2 million workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2005). In 2004, temporary agency work accounted for between 1 and 2 percent of total employment in most of the European Union countries, equivalent to around 3 million full-time equivalent employees (Arrowsmith 2006). This proportion is slightly larger in Australia, where agency temps accounted for approximately 2.9 percent of the workforce in 2002 (Laplagne, Glover and Fry 2005). While currently only a small proportion of the workforce, the use of agency temps is expected to continue to increase (Connell and Burgess 2002; Handy and Davy 2007).

Mowday (1998) argues that because businesses face increasing competitive challenges, a strategy of developing committed employees holds the promise of superior financial returns. A meta-analysis by Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, and Toplnytsky (2002) confirms the theoretical and practical value of organizational commitment, being related negatively to turnover and positively to attendance, in-role performance, job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational citizenship behaviors (see also Wright and Kehoe 2008). Thus, commitment is a desirable attribute of agency temps, both for client organizations and for temporary work agencies (Van Breugel, Van Olffen and Olie 2005).

Given the benefits of agency temps having high commitment, and the increasing numbers of temporary workers, the question is how can organizations
develop and maintain commitment? Although a considerable amount of research has examined the organizational commitment of permanent employees, little empirical work has investigated the commitment of agency temps (Connelly, Gallagher, and Gilley 2007; Gallagher and McLean Parks 2001; Linden et al. 2003; Van Breugel, Van Olffen and Olie 2005). At any particular point in time, an agency temp has two different foci for organizational commitment: The temporary work agency and the client organization (Gallagher and McLean Parks 2001; Connelly and Gallagher 2004). Theoretically, it is important for both of these entities to have agency temps who are committed to them, to gain the maximum benefit from the contingent work arrangement. However, to date that has been no comprehensive investigation of Meyer and Allen’s (1991) affective, normative, and continuance commitments simultaneously across both entities. Affective commitment refers to individuals’ emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in their organization, where as continuance commitment describes individuals’ awareness of the costs associated with leaving their organization, and normative commitment is the feeling of obligation to continue employment with the organization. We address this notable gap in this research.

**Commitment Research in Agency Temps**

Temporary employment is assumed to have negative consequences for agency temps’ organizational commitment to the client organization due to (1) their exclusion from the corporate family (Reilly 1998; Sverke, Gallagher, and Hellgren 2000) and (2) the asymmetrical social exchange of agency temps’ employment situation resulting in a reduction of their commitment to their client organization as a means to restore balance (De Witte and Naswall 2003). Despite the theoretical rationale for lower commitment among agency temps, the majority of investigations of affective
commitment have failed to find a significant difference between permanent workers and agency temps (De Witte and Naswall 2003; Feather and Rauter 2004; Pearce 1993; Porter 1995, cited in Van Dyne and Ang 1998; Tansky, Gallagher, and Wetzel 1995, cited in Van Dyne and Ang 1998). Studies that have found differences have found both lower levels of affective commitment of agency temps to their client organization than permanent workers (Sverke, Gallagher, and Hellgren 2000; Van Dyne and Ang 1998) and higher levels (McDonald and Makin 2000). This may be because a set level of affective commitment develops quickly after starting a job regardless of its permanency (Kondratuk et al. 2004; Meyer, Bobocel, and Allen 1991), or that there are positive elements to temporary work situations, such as flexibility, which outweigh any negative factors (Gannon 1984; Thornthwaite 2004). Comparisons of agency temps’ organizational commitments to their client organization and their temporary work agency have shown dual rather than competing commitments to these entities (Benson 1998; Connelly, Gallagher, and Gilley 2007; Linden et al. 2003; McClurg 1999). This fits with other evidence that individuals form commitments to multiple entities (e.g. Bishop et al. 2005; Connelly, Gallagher, and Gilley 2007; Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow 2006; Redman and Snape 2005).

**Commitment as Part of an Exchange**

If agency temps have similar levels of affective commitment to permanent workers, it seems plausible that the antecedents of commitment, at least commitment to the client organization, are the same for both types of worker. Perceived organizational support (POS) represents one’s global beliefs about the extent to which an organization values one’s contributions and cares about one’s wellbeing (Eisenberger et al. 1986). Based on the work of Blau (1964), Eisenberger et al. proposed that POS operates within a social exchange framework where employees are
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Motivated to maintain social equilibrium in their employment relationship, so they reciprocate POS by repaying their organization with affective commitment (De Witte and Naswall 2003). In line with Eisenberger et al.’s contention, POS is one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of affective commitment in permanent workers (e.g. Eisenberger et al. 1986; Eisenberger et al 2001; Gakovic and Tetrick 2003; Meyer et al. 2002; Shore and Wayne 1993; Wayne, Shore, and Liden 1997). In the small amount of research that has investigated POS and affective commitment for agency temps, moderate-to-strong positively relations have been found with POS both from the client organization and from the temporary work agency, and also with continuance commitment to the client organization and the temporary work agency (Connelly, Gallagher, and Gilley 2007; Linden et al.; McClurg 1999; Van Breugel, Van Olffen and Olie 2005). Furthermore, one study has shown cross-over effects, with POS from one entity affecting commitments to the other (Connelly, Gallagher, and Gilley 2007).

In spite of these similar results for POS, some authors have suggested the antecedents of commitment differ, and have theorized that agency temps tend to focus on the economic, transactional elements of their employment situation (Connelly and Gallagher 2004; Gallagher and McLean Parks 2001; Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni 1995). In this case, placement-related variables representing this transaction, such as duration of registration and number of placements facilitated by the agency, should predict agency temps’ commitments, such that agency temps would be more committed to agencies that provide more and longer placements. Yet there is a lack of empirical evidence for this.

Only two prior studies have statistically evaluated the differences between agency temps’ levels of commitment to their client organization and temporary work
agency. Benson (1998) found agency temps’ reported higher affective commitment to their client organization than their temporary work agency, which he suggested was because (1) agency temps lacked regular interaction with their temporary work agency, and (2) affective commitment in agency temps was determined more by work experiences and less by their legal employment situation. Van Breugel, Van Olffen and Olie (2005) found that affective commitment to temporary work agencies was at a moderate level, and continuance commitment was slightly, although significantly, lower. They suggested this provides evidence that short-term assignments increase the significance of the temporary work agency to the worker, and hence influence affective commitment. However, such short-term assignments, and hence high affective commitment, may have been specific to this setting, since Dutch law prohibits agency temps from remaining with a client organization for longer than three months (Van Breugel, Van Olffen and Olie 2005).

The Current Investigation
There remain notable gaps in our knowledge of agency temps’ commitments to their temporary work agency and their client organizations, in particular comparing all three levels of commitments relative to each other and between entities. Further, initial research has shown that POS predicts some types of commitment for agency temps both within entities (Connelly, Gallagher, and Gilley 2007; Linden et al.; McClurg 1999; Van Breugel et al 2005), and across entities. Yet, if agency temps do have more transactional relationships with both their temporary work agency and client organization (Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni 1995), commitments should also be predicted by relevant placement-related variables (Benson 1998; McClurg 1999). Since the relationship of placement-related variables with commitments has not been investigated previously, we pose broad research questions to frame these inquiries
rather than specific hypotheses. In contrast, since there has been some research on the relationships between POS and commitments, and commitments within and across entities, for these we pose specific hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: POS from the client organization will be positively related to (a) affective commitment, (b) continuance commitment, and (c) normative commitment.

Hypothesis 2: POS from the temporary work agency will be positively related to (a) affective commitment, (b) continuance commitment, and (c) normative commitment.

Research Question 1: What cross-over relationships are there between POS from one entity and commitments to the other entity?

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between the duration of agency temps’ current placement with their client organization and their (a) affective commitment, (b) continuance commitment, and (c) normative commitment to that entity?

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between temporary work agency placement-related variables of duration of registration, number of placements facilitated, and number of other temporary work agency registrations held with (a) affective commitment, (b) continuance commitment, and (c) normative commitment to that entity?

Research on permanent workers has shown that the various elements of the employment situation (e.g. on-the-job experiences and security of employment) are differentially related to each commitment type (Meyer and Allen 1991; Meyer et al. 2002). As the elements that comprise the employment situation of an agency temp are shared between the client organization (e.g. on-the-job experiences) and the
temporary work agency (e.g. security of employment), and since these are antecedents to different types of commitment, one would expect to observe different patterns of commitment to each entity. Previous research has found some evidence to suggest that agency temps have higher levels of commitment to their client organization than their temporary work agency (Benson 1998; Linden et al. 2003; McClurg 1999).

Looking in detail at the three commitment types, work experiences such as organizational rewards, procedural justice, and POS, which are more likely to be provided by the client organization, have demonstrated strong associations with affective commitment (Allen and Meyer 1996; Meyer et al. 2002; Meyer and Herscovitch 2001). The internalization of norms via socialization and/or the receipt of valued benefits (e.g. recognition) are associated with normative commitment (Allen and Meyer 1996; Meyer et al. 2002; Meyer and Herscovitch 2001), and again these are more likely to be provided by the client organization (McDonald and Makin 2000) (although we note that wages are ambiguous here, since they are provided indirectly by the client organization, and directly by the temporary work agency). Personal investments in an organization of time and effort, and perceived employment alternatives, are associated with continuance commitment (Allen and Meyer 1996; Meyer et al. 2002; Meyer and Herscovitch 2001). In this context, the ongoing role of the agency in supplying work to the agency temp will be more conducive to fostering continuance commitment than the client organization (Gallagher and McLean Parks 2001). Thus:

Hypothesis 3: Agency temps will report higher (a) affective commitment and (b) normative commitment to their client organization than their temporary work agency, and (c) higher continuance commitment to their temporary work agency.
Given the flexibility that agency temps have to work both for different client organizations and different temporary work agencies, it is likely that continuance commitment is the least prevalent commitment type. It is less clear whether affective or normative commitment will predominate in attachments to either entity: Choosing a more flexible work option may indicate that agency temps are reluctant to become emotionally attached (lower affective commitment), yet, on the other hand, given the flexibility and more transient nature of their relationships with organizations, agency temps may feel less obliged (lower normative commitment).

Hypothesis 4: Agency temps will report greater levels affective and normative commitments than continuance commitment in respect of both their (a) client organization and (b) temporary work agency.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Participants were agency temps at Agency X, a large human resources outsourcing firm based in Auckland. For this research, surveys were sent to all temps on the clerical payroll of Agency X for one week. 496 temps were on the payroll at the time the first survey was distributed. Three weeks later, a reminder was sent out to the 449 individuals on the clerical pay roll for that week. Since the payroll of Agency X varies each week, some temps received only one of these two mailings. New Zealand’s Privacy Act (1993) prevents access to Agency X’s database, and hence we cannot calculate exact response rates. 79 questionnaires were received from the original survey mailing, at a response rate of 16%. Additionally, three individuals who received only the reminder letter agreed to participate, increasing the overall sample to 82. The response rates are 16% or 18% respectively across the two overlapping
samples. While these are low, they fall at approximately one standard deviation from the mean for organizational survey response rates (Baruch and Holtom 2008).

Further, we note that agency temps are difficult to access because they tend not to exist in large numbers in single organisations (Biggs and Swailes 2006). Further, agency temps had to respond during their own time, which is likely to have reduced responding.

Removal of incomplete responses and outliers left 73 respondents. The mean age of participants was 36 years (SD = 11). The sample consisted of 60 females (82%) and 13 males (18%). By ethnicity, 47 of participants identified themselves as New Zealand European/Pakeha; 8 Maori; 2 as Pacific; 2 as Chinese; 1 as non-Chinese Asian; and 13% as Other. In terms of highest level of education, 34% had a high school qualification; 33% had an undergraduate degree or diploma; 23% had a postgraduate degree or diploma; and 10% had no qualification. Further socio-demographic information can be found in Table 1. While the number of participants in the investigation is small, the sample has a similar demographic distribution to past research conducted on agency temps in New Zealand (Hardy and Walker 2003).

**Measures**

All data were gathered from the participants by self-report questionnaire. The response scale for POS, affective, continuance, and normative commitments was 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). These four variables were measured with identical items for client organization and temporary work agency, other than reference to either “client organization” or “temping agency [Agency X]”. Cronbach alphas are provided in Table 1.

**Perception of Organizational Support**
In line with other researchers, we used a shortened version of Eisenberger et al.’s (1986) scale, using the ten highest loading (Eisenberger et al. 1997; Linden et al. 2003; Lynch, Eisenberger, and Armeli 1999; Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli 2001). An example item is “Help is available from my client organization when I have a problem”.

Organizational Commitment
Affective, continuance, and normative commitment were measured with the three Meyer, Allen, and Smith’s (1993) six item scales, which have been found to be valid and reliable (e.g. Allen and Meyer 1996; Dunham, Grube, and Castenada 1994; Hackett, Bycio, and Hausdorf 1994; Meyer, Allen, and Smith 1993). Example items for client organization commitments are: “My client organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me” (affective commitment); “Right now, staying with my client organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire” (continuance commitment); and “I would feel guilty if I left my client organization now” (normative commitment).

Placement-Related Information
A number of single-item questions were asked relating to the work situation of the agency temp. Temporary work agency-related questions included the length of registration with the temporary work agency, the number of placements facilitated by the temporary work agency, and the number of other temporary work agency registrations held; a single client organization-related question was the duration of the current placement.
Results
Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, correlations, and Cronbach’s alphas where appropriate, for all variables. The duration of the current client organization placement was 4 months, with a wide amount of variation. On average, agency temps had been with the temporary work agency for 12 months, and had had 2 placements in that time (including their current placement), with most not belonging to at least one other temporary work agency (median = 0). Levels of POS from client organization and temporary work agency were quite high and similar. All types of commitment to client organization and temporary work agency were moderate and similar.

Examining the Predictor Variables of Commitment
A series of multiple regressions was computed to assess predictors of affective, continuance and normative commitments to the client organization and temporary work agency respectively (see Table 2). All correlations met the requirements for a multiple regression; tolerance values were more than .10 indicating an absence of multicollinearity in the regression equations; inspections of the normal probability plots showed that assumptions of normality were met; and inspection the scatterplots of the standardized residuals confirmed that there were no outliers. Although the sample size is small, it meets Harris's (1985) criterion for multiple regression, namely that with five or fewer predictors, the number of participants should exceed the number of predictors by at least 50.

Looking first at commitments to the client organization, Table 2 shows the multiple regressions for affective and normative commitments were significant, with
only POS a significant positive predictor for each ($\beta = .73$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .54$, $p < .001$ respectively). The multiple regression for continuance commitment was not significant. These results support Hypothesis 1(a) and (c) but not (b), and show no relationships in answer to Research Question 2.

Looking at temps’ commitments to their temporary work agency, again the regressions for affective and normative commitments were significant, but that for continuance commitment was not. For affective commitment, both duration of registration with temporary work agency ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$) and POS from temporary work agency ($\beta = .72$, $p < .001$) were significant positive predictors. For normative commitment, the number of other temporary work agency registrations held ($\beta = .23$, $p < .05$), POS from the client organization ($\beta = .24$, $p < .05$), and POS from temporary work agency ($\beta = .51$, $p < .001$) were significant positive predictors. Again, the multiple regression for continuance commitment was not significant. These results support Hypothesis 2 (a) and (c) but not (b), and answer Research Questions 1 and 3 respectively, with only one of six possible cross-over relationships significant, and two placement-related variables each significant predictors for one type of commitment.

**Examining Differences between Commitment Types**

Further analyses were conducted to investigate Hypotheses 3 and 4. To control for the possibility of a type-I error, a within-participants 3 X 2 ANOVA (two entities: Temporary work agency and client organization; three commitment types: Affective, continuance, and normative) was conducted. Mauchly’s Test of Sphericity indicated unequal variances ($W(2)=.85$, $p<.01$), so further analyses used the conservative Greenhouse-Geisser calculations. A main effect was observed for entity, ($F(1, 72) = 3.96$, $p = .05$), suggesting that on average there was a significant difference in the
corresponding levels of agency temps’ affective, continuance, and normative commitments to client organization and temporary work agency. After computing pooled mean square error and pooled degrees of freedom error values, post-hoc Cochran’s (1950) Q-tests were used to analyze the differences between the corresponding commitment types between each entity (see Table 3). This method of analysis was chosen for post-hoc tests as it is more conservative than other similar F-tests and t-tests (Giles 2002). The analysis revealed no significant differences between corresponding affective and continuance commitments within each entity. However, the difference between normative commitments was statistically significant ($q(.76, 138.99) = 4.07, p<.05$), with normative commitment to the client organization higher. These results support Hypothesis 3b, but not 3a or 3c.

A main effect was also observed for commitment type ($F(1.60, 115.03) = 5.64, p < .01$). Again, post-hoc Cochran’s (1950) Q-tests were used (see Table 4), showing only one significant difference, with normative commitment to the client organization higher than continuance commitment ($q(1.74, 177.97) = 2.70, p<.05$). This provides partial support for Hypothesis 4a, but not 4b.

No main interaction effect was observed between commitment type and entity ($F(1.74, 125.00) = .24, p = .76$) indicating that, on average, agency temps’ patterns of commitments to the temporary work agency and client organization were similar.

Discussion

This research extends previous findings relating to agency temps’ commitments to explore affective, continuance, and normative commitments to both their temporary work agency and their client organization; and the prediction of all
three commitments by a combination of variables not previously investigated.

Overall, the findings show that POS, a relational antecedent of commitment, was a significant predictor of affective and normative commitments to both temporary work agency and client organization within entities (Hypotheses 1 and 2), with only one cross-over relationship (Research Question 1). Of the placement-related, transactional antecedents investigated, none of those for the client organization were significant, while for the temporary work agency relationship, duration of registration with the temporary work agency was a weak positive predictor of affective commitment and number of other temporary work agency registrations was a weak positive predictor of normative commitment (Research Questions 2 and 3). Within and between entities analyses indicated higher levels of normative commitments to the client organization than the temporary work agency (Hypothesis 3) and higher levels of normative than continuance commitment for client organization only (Hypothesis 4).

Looking in more detail, this research was the first to investigate the predictors of continuance and normative commitments to the client organization and temporary work agency simultaneously in agency temps, and the findings are largely consistent with previous research with permanent workers (e.g. Gakovic and Tetrick; Meyer et al. 2002). Our findings for the predictors of affective commitment are similar to previous research both with agency temps (Benson, 1998; Connelly, Gallagher, and Gilley 2007; Linden et al. 2003; McClurg, 1999) and permanent workers (e.g. Eisenberger et al. 2001; Gakovic and Tetrick 2003; Meyer et al. 2002; Shore and Wayne, 1993; Wayne, Shore, and Linden 1997). These findings support Linden et al.’s contention that affective commitment in agency temps operates within a social exchange framework (Blau, 1964), where POS is reciprocated by repaying both client
organizations and temporary work agencies, and extends this also to normative commitment.

The findings of a null relationship between POS and continuance commitment are consistent with research on permanent workers (e.g. Eisenberger et al. 1990; Gakovic and Tetrick 2003; Meyer et al. 2002; O’Driscoll and Randall 1999), although they contradict previous research with agency temps (Connelly, Gallagher, and Gilley 2007; Van Breugel, Van Olffen and Olie 2005). These, combined with the null relationships for placement-related variables, suggest that agency temps in this sample did not feel constrained to stay with either the temporary work agency or the client organization by either relational or transactional variables. It is possible that environmental factors provided a perception of job mobility and can account for this outcome. Specifically, past research on permanent workers has shown that perceptions of job mobility have a moderate negative relationship with continuance commitment (Meyer et al. 2002). At the time of survey New Zealand had an unemployment rate of 3.7 percent, the lowest of all member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (Pink 2005). Respondents had, on average, one other temporary work agency registration, and with a large proportion have two others (see standard deviation in Table 1). Hence, they could likely have taken up a placement facilitated by another temporary work agency.

We found weak evidence for a cross-over effect for POS, with POS from the client organization predicting normative commitment to the temporary work agency. This confirms that there can be cross-over benefits, yet there seems to be no specific pattern to these in the research to date (see Connelly, Gallagher, and Gilley 2007). Continuance commitment to client organization showed weak positive relationships with affective and normative commitments to client organization. This
finding is at odds with research on permanent workers which tends to show no
relationship between continuance with affective and normative commitments (e.g.
Gakovic and Tetrick 2003; Meyer et al. 2002). These results suggest that a significant
perceived cost for agency temps of leaving a client organization is emotional in
nature. Indeed, this is consistent with the transient nature of temporary work and
could explain why a stronger relationship between POS and affective and normative
commitments has been found in agency temps than in permanent workers (Benson,
1998).

Two placement-related variables predicted commitments to the temporary
work agency. Duration of registration with temporary work agency predicted affective
commitment to this entity; this finding is consistent with McClurg (1999), but
contradicts Benson (1998). Given that affective commitment develops quickly
(Kondratuk et al. 2004; Meyer, Bobocel, and Allen 1991), it is logical to assume that
an agency temp who is highly affectively committed to their temporary work agency
stays longer. The second relationship was of number of other temporary work agency
registrations held by agency temps which predicted normative commitment to the
temporary work agency. One possible explanation is that agency temps experience
cognitive dissonance in that they could have found work elsewhere, and so justify this
decision by feeling more obliged to the temporary work agency that facilitated their
current placement (Festinger, 1957). Alternatively, it may be that career agency
temps are those with more temporary work agency registrations, and overall they
recognize reciprocal normative obligations to sustain this career path. Further
research is needed to explore these possible explanations.

The means for affective, continuance, and normative commitments to both
client organization and temporary work agency were moderate. The levels of affective
commitment to the client organization were lower than those found in previous investigations, but levels of affective commitment to the temporary work agency were similar (Benson 1998; Connelly, Gallagher, and Gilley 2007; Linden et al. 2003; McClurg 1999). It was predicted that agency temps would report higher levels of affective commitment to their client organization than their temporary work agency, due to greater interpersonal contact, but differences between these means were not significant. As noted above, the favorable employment conditions during the period of data collection may have influenced agency temps, in this case causing them to lower their affective commitment to their client organization to balance a belief that in a favorable economic climate they should be offered permanent work. Alternatively, affective commitment to the temporary work agency may have been increased due to Agency X’s proactive management of its relationship with its temps, through activities such as staff social evenings and monthly newsletters. These actions may serve to increase the affective and normative commitments of their agency temps directly, and also indirectly via POS.

Overall, agency temps displayed unexpectedly similar patterns of commitment to the temporary work agency and the client organization. There was only one instance of differences in commitment types within an entity, with higher levels of normative than continuance commitment to the client organization.

Limitations

The use of self-report measures introduces the possibility of bias due to common method variance. However, self-report measures appear to be most appropriate data collection method for introspectively experienced phenomena such as employees' commitment and POS (Crampton and Wagner 1994; Schalm and Kelloway 2001). A second issue is that this sample was comprised primarily of
women, in clerical positions, from a single temporary work agency at a time when the favorable labor market for employees meant that other options were likely available. This brings into question the applicability of the findings to other agencies, economies, industries, and nations. Although research suggests that gender does not influence levels of commitment (Meyer et al. 2002), there is some evidence to suggest that job type may influence POS (Eisenberger et al. 1986), and scarcity of alternatives has been linked to levels of continuance commitment (Meyer and Allen 1991; Meyer et al. 2002). Further, Agency X may differ from other agencies in respect of the type of temps it attracts, and how it develops and maintains relationships with them, as well in the types of clerical jobs obtained. However, Agency X is one of the largest temporary work agencies in New Zealand and therefore, this research on agency temps is likely to be reasonably representative of the experience of agency temps more broadly. Third, the research was conducted using a single data collection, so the causal direction of the relationships found in the research cannot be inferred from the data. However, POS has been shown to predict affective commitment using a longitudinal research design (e.g. Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli 2001), so it is likely that this extends to the current situation and also other commitments. Last, the sample size, although sufficient for the analyses conducted, may not have picked up small effects, relationships, or differences between the variables examined.

**Directions for Future Research**

This study contributes to a small body of research examining the commitments of agency temps. Indeed, it is the first to examine simultaneously the affective, continuance, and normative commitments of agency temps to their client organization and temporary work agency. Further research is needed to explore the relationships found in this research using a larger and more varied sample. Future research would
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benefit from investigations of work experience variables such as role ambiguity, role conflict and job satisfaction, and other variables that have been found to be related to continuance commitment, such as transferability of skills, satisfaction with employment inducements, and the availability of alternatives including both type of temporary assignment as well as temporary versus permanent work (Ellingson, Gruys, and Sackett 1998; Meyer et al. 2002), to see whether these variables have the same relationships with the commitment types in agency temps as have been found in permanent workers. Further, research has yet to examine the outcomes of each commitment type in agency temps. Because it is much easier for agency temps to leave their jobs than permanent workers, their levels of affective, continuance, and normative commitments may relate to outcomes in a different way to permanent workers.

Additionally, it has been suggested that temporary work may serve different purposes for different individuals (Connelly, Gallagher, and Gilley 2007; McClurg 1999). While some may be using temporary work as a means of assessing or attaining secure core positions (Polivka and Nardone 1989) or as a temporary measure in a weak employment market (Ellingson et al. 1998), others may have chosen temporary work as a way to consciously avoid core employment (Gannon 1984), or to achieve flexibility (Thornthwaite 2004). Different agency temp motivations are likely to have different implications for commitments to both client organization and temporary work agency, as the former may be more committed to the client organization in the hope of securing a permanent position with the company, whereas the latter may be more committed to the temporary work agency as being more instrumental in procuring employment. These are exciting and useful avenues for future agency temp research.
Practical Implications

Perhaps the most important practical implication of this research is that POS in agency temps is important in determining both affective and normative commitments to their temporary work agencies and client organizations. Thus, in addition to providing excellent placement opportunities, temporary work agencies should aim to provide support to their agency temps (POS), especially if the agency temp is on a long-term placement with a client organization. Similarly, client organizations using temps should try to make them feel as welcome and included in their organization as soon as possible, as results indicate that a significant perceived cost of leaving a client organization is an emotional one. There may also be some incidental benefits, with POS from one entity affecting attitudes also to the other entity.

The question then arises as to how temporary work agencies and client organizations can achieve higher POS in agency temps. The essence of POS is that employees perceive that the organization values and supports them in their work, and cares about their needs. A key period for employees is their initial socialization into the organization (Cooper-Thomas and Anderson 2005) and, given the frequent transitions that agency temps’ experience across organizations, we propose that considering POS during socialization is helpful. Cooper-Thomas and Anderson propose learning occurs across four core domains during socialization: Social, role, interpersonal resources, and organization. Taking these in the context of the client organization as an example, actions could include helping the agency temp form social links with colleagues, such as by hosting a work group coffee morning (social domain), supporting negotiation of a role that suits the agency temp’s abilities and organization needs (role domain), providing an experienced buddy (interpersonal resources domain), and including the agency temp in induction and training events that enable them to better understand the organization (organization domain). Using
processes such as these, including both formal and informal socialization (Meyer et al. 2002), both temporary work agencies and client organizations may be able to get better attendance, performance, and reduced early exit of agency temps.

**Conclusions**

This investigation examined agency temps’ affective, continuance, and normative commitments to their temporary work agency and client organizations, specifically looking at what variables predicted each type of commitment, and how the levels of commitment differed. The findings indicate that POS predicts normative and affective commitments to both temporary work agency and client organization, providing support for the contention that these variables are governed by a social exchange relationship. Continuance commitment was not related to any of the variables hypothesized. Commitments to both entities were moderate and broadly similar to the small amount of past research on agency temps. Given the scarcity of research in this area, further research is needed on this important and growing sector of the workforce, both to improve our theoretical understanding and to ameliorate outcomes for all parties.
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References


Table 1: Variable Descriptives, Correlations, and Internal Reliabilities (where applicable)

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<th>10</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1. Age (years)</td>
<td>36.12</td>
<td>11.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Duration of current CO placement (months)</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>7.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Duration of registration with TWA (months)</td>
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<td>31.49</td>
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<td>.47**</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Number of placements by TWA</td>
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<td>5. Number of other TWA registrations held</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. POS from CO</td>
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<td>7. POS from TWA</td>
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<td>.02</td>
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<td>(.95)</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. AC to CO</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>1.48</td>
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<td>.16</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.72**</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
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<td>9. AC to TWA</td>
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<td>.73**</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>(.89)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. CC to CO</td>
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<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>(.81)</td>
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<td>11. CC to TWA</td>
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<td>.15</td>
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<td>-.05</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>(.76)</td>
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<td>12. NC to CO</td>
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<td>1.43</td>
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<td>.18</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>.62**</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
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<td>13. NC to TWA</td>
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<td>1.26</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>.62**</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>.72**</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>.62**</td>
<td>(.85)</td>
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</table>

Note. ** p<0.01 level, * p<0.05 (2-tailed). Internal consistency reliabilities (alpha coefficients) are reported in parentheses along the diagonal. CO = client organization; TWA = temporary work agency; AC = affective commitment; CC = continuance commitment; NC = normative commitment
### Temporary Agency Workers’ Commitments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Affective Commitment</th>
<th>Continuance Commitment</th>
<th>Normative Commitment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Client Organization</strong></td>
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<td>Duration of current CO placement</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td>.88</td>
<td>.73***</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>.34***</td>
<td>.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>R</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adj. R²</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
<td>.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>F†</td>
<td>26.27***</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>10.68***</td>
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<td><strong>Temporary Work Agency</strong></td>
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<td>Duration of registration with TWA</td>
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<td>Adj. R²</td>
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<tr>
<td>F‡</td>
<td>15.65***</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>10.94***</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** † df (3, 69); ‡ df (5, 59); * = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001. CO = client organization; TWA = temporary work agency.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means being compared</th>
<th>Q-statistic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affective – Affective</td>
<td>-2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance – Continuance</td>
<td>1.34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Normative – Normative</td>
<td>4.07*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** For all comparisons: the pooled mean square error = .76; pooled df error = 138.99. * = p < 0.05
Table 4: Post hoc q-test comparisons of commitment types within entities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means being compared</th>
<th>Q-statistic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Client Organization</td>
<td>Temporary Work Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affective – Normative</td>
<td>-0.79</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective – Continuance</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Normative – Continuance</td>
<td>3.48*</td>
<td>2.65</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. For all comparisons: the pooled mean square error = 1.74; pooled df error = 177.97. * = p < 0.05