



ARTICLE

Motivations of temporary agency workers and context free well-being: Work engagement as a mediator



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Abstract According to the self-determination theory, when people choose to work voluntarily and have intrinsic motivations they show more interest and enthusiasm that manifest in their results toward work and general life. With a sample of 2320 temporary agency workers and through structural equations models, our main goal was to analyze the relationship between motivations for being temporary agency workers and work engagement. Additionally, we studied the extent to which more work engagement is associated with higher levels of context free well-being and we also analyzed the role of engagement as mediator in the relationship between motivations and this context free well-being. Generally, the results support our assumptions and suggest the important role of temporary workers' motivations in their well-being.

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1. Introduction

Motivation has been a construct largely studied and valued in the field of Psychology mainly due to its consequences. Motivation leads the individuals to action, giving both direction and intention to this (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to the self-determination theory (SDT), when individuals are involved in a task or action they can have many different reasons for doing so and these reasons have impact in the

quality of their behavior and their mental health (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Among different types of employment relationships that we can find in contemporary organizations, the present study will focus on temporary agency workers (TAW) that are characterized by having a threefold employment relationship, i.e., they are hired by a temporary work agency – the *juro* employer – to perform work at a client company – the *de facto* employer (De Cuyper et al., 2008).

Although permanent employment relationships (i.e. an employment relationship where it is expected that work was done in full-time, would continue in a long-term, and was performed at the employer's place of business under the employer's direction) are the most predominant, the growth in temporary employment is a striking aspect in Western working life (De Cuyper et al., 2008). In 2012, almost

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36 million people around the world have been working in agency work (CIETT, 2014). More specifically, in Portugal – the country where the current investigation is performed – the number of workers with temporary employment contract increased 2.00% between 2005 and 2013 (PORDATA, 2014). This temporary employment relationship can be seen as supporting people in important transitions in the labor market. For example, transitions from short term employment to a more permanent position and also transitions from unemployment to work (CIETT, 2014). In Portugal, according CIETT report (2014), the amount of agency workers who remain employed after temporary work is significantly higher (71%) than those who do not have this experience of temporary employment (18%). This suggests that agency work may not only function as a short term solution but also increases the opportunity to overcome the unemployment situation.

The agency work was developed to meet an increased volatility in labor demand and to support organizations in adapting to the impact that each economic cycle has on their employment levels (CIETT, 2014; EUROCIETT, 2011). It is important to note, that in the last years, organizations suffered from a constant pressure due to economic (e.g. increased international competition, market fluctuations) and social changes (e.g. workforce demographic characteristics, technological development). Thus, a more complex environment emerges resulting in structural organizational changes including downsizing and outsourcing (Chen, Tsui, & Zhong, 2008; Hiltrop, 1996; Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007).

Considering the specificity of the agency employment it is important to observe how motivations for being TAW are related to their well-being. Along with the previous overview, other studies underline the vulnerability of temporary workers. This point of view comes from the instability and insecurity associated with the work arrangement, deficient benefits and on-the-job-training, lack of promotion prospects and exposure to hazardous work conditions (e.g., Benach, Benavides, Platt, Diez-Roux, & Muntaner, 2000; Kompier, Ybema, Janssen, & Taris, 2009; Sverke, Hellgren, & Naswall, 2002; Underhill & Quinlan, 2011). Instead of this negative view it is also interesting to analyze if the workers that have a positive work experience (i.e. cognitive and affective positive mindset) spillover this experience to non-work domains. As such, in this study we analyze: (1) the relationship between the motivations and the work engagement, (2) the relationship between the work engagement and the context free well-being and (3) the work engagement as a mediator between the motivations and the context free well-being.

This study has contributions to the literature and future investigations. First, although some studies suggest the significant impact of motivations in TAW outcomes, these studies used merely a dichotomous perspective (e.g., Chambel, 2011), or consider only three types of motivations (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2008). The present research, using a measure already validated by Lopes and Chambel (2014), aims to provide a more complex analysis of TAW motivations, conceptualized in SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000). With the recognition of the differentiated impact that each type of motivation can have on the workers' results, it is expected to contribute with proposals or actions to be taken by temporary work agencies and their client companies. Secondly,

as previously noted, the present research aims to give some clues about the importance of the experiences in the professional context to the experiences outside the work, through the analysis of well-being reported by individuals. By focusing on the work engagement (i.e. a positive dimension of work well-being) we expect help to clarify the repercussions of one domain in other life domains. Third, work engagement has been suggested as a possible mediating variable (e.g. Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; Yalabik, Popaitoon, Chowne, & Rayton, 2013). However, to our knowledge, no studies have yet been done to examine the role of work engagement as a mediator variable of the relationship between the motivations and the context free well-being of individuals.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Motivations and work engagement

Based on the SDT, in the present research we considered four types of motivations, attending to the characteristics of temporary work. The types of motivations vary within a continuum of motivation: from motivations with a more intrinsic and autonomous/self-determined nature to motivations with increasingly extrinsic and less autonomous/self-determined nature (Ryan & Deci, 2000). We distinguished: (1) intrinsic motivation that represents individuals that choose this temporary employment arrangement for its inherent satisfaction, which is highly autonomous and does not depend of external contingencies; (2) integrated motivation that represents individuals that accept the current temporary arrangement because it is actually the type of employment that fits better their personal needs or commitments (e.g. school, family) or that better provides the flexibility they need, as well as the freedom to balance it with other personal goals; (3) identified motivation that reflects a conscious valuing of a behavioral goal or regulation, in such a fashion that the action is accepted or owned as personally important. When TAW motivation is regulated through identification, they recognize the value of that job to their personal objectives, since they see it as a mean to develop skills that will be helpful for them or as a mean to gain a permanent employment – i.e., stepping stone motive. Finally, we also considered a less autonomous type of motivation, the (4) external motivation, which encloses individuals that opt for this temporary arrangement in order to obtain a desired consequence (e.g. tangible rewards) and to avoid punishments (e.g. unemployment).

Some theoretical studies suggest a relationship between motivations and work well-being, namely positive relationships between intrinsic and integrated motivation and engagement (e.g. Gagné & Deci, 2005; Stone, Deci, and Ryan, 2009). Work engagement can be defined as a cognitive and affective positive mindset related to work, and characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Vigor is translated in high levels of energy and mental resistance as well as in desire and capacity to invest effort in work. Dedication is a feeling of relevance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge directed toward work. Absorption is similar to a state of persistent flow, where the person is totally

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