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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Anticipatory Orientation in Temporary Employment and Employee Performance: A Qualitative Exploratory Study

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The aim of this qualitative inquiry is to offer novel insights on the individual and organisational consequences of temporary work, especially in relation to performance. This study examines how fixed-term employees engage, and are enabled to engage, in their day-to-day work activities under the conditions marked by limited time horizon and resulting anticipatory orientation. The data consist of 30 open-ended interviews with highly educated fixed-term employees. A thematic analysis of the data showed that the anticipatory orientation – a necessity for predicting the future and preparing for it at the cost of the present – related to performance in several ways. Employees were forced to slide elsewhere while simultaneously trying to perform, which was associated with feelings of restlessness and the need to regulate and hide emotions at the workplace. In addition, employees could experience detachment from work due to the soon-to-be-outsider position within the organisation. Especially in the context of serial fixed-term contracts and hope for permanent position, intensive efforts to earn a place by adjusting and appearing as 'appropriate' were present. Overall, the results imply that fixed-term working conditions may lead to a deterioration of one critical performance resource: a reasonable time horizon in harmony with the work requirements. Without this resource, employees may not be able to perform at a self-satisfactory level and thus are exposed to stress. In order to understand the consequences of non-permanent work, the role of temporality and the conditions of self-satisfactory performance should be acknowledged and further examined.

Keywords: temporary employment; fixed-term employment; performance; work-related stress; qualitative research; thematic analysis

Introduction

According to a recent Eurofound report (2016), the prevalence of temporary employment has been growing across many European countries for at least three decades. This can be viewed as a result of reforms loosening employment protection legislation. These reforms give employers greater flexibility to adjust their workforces. According to the OECD's (2016) definition, temporary employment includes 'wage and salary workers whose job has a pre-determined termination date'. When evaluated as a per cent of dependent employees (i.e. wage and salary workers), temporary employees (in 2015) accounted for 14% in the European Union and 15% in Finland. There is considerable variation between EU countries (OECD, 2016). In Finland, the most common form of non-standard employment is fixed-term employment, which is more prevalent among women. A typical fixed-term employee in Finland may be described as a 'youngish female working in a public sector occupation in education or social and health care' and having a relatively high level of education in comparison to other EU countries (Pärnänen, 2010).

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For employers, the utilisation of a flexible workforce can appear to be a straightforward way to achieve labour cost savings. However, the organisational downsides and the needs of temporary employees can remain unrecognised. Zeytinoglu et al.'s (2003, 2004) qualitative study – one of few – demonstrates how the stress resulting from poor working conditions related to non-standard work can have several individual and organisational effects: increased absenteeism, turnover and workplace conflict, lowered job satisfaction, and decreased workplace morale. The use of a contingent workforce can have a harmful impact on organisational productivity (Stirpe, Bonache and Revilla, 2014) and organisational innovativeness (Altuzarra and Serrano, 2010). These findings imply that the individual and organisational effects of temporary work are intertwined in a complex manner. As Bernhard-Oettel and colleagues (2013: 215) point out, the performance, creativity, and innovative behaviour of temporary employees have a relevant impact on organisational success, as temporary employees form a considerable group in many organisations. Personal well-being and satisfaction are necessary conditions for success in this respect. Therefore, it is vital to increase knowledge and understanding of the needs and perceptions of temporary workers (Bernhard-Oettel et al., 2013: 2015). Sverke, Hellgren and Näsvald (2002) also emphasise that

employees' behavioural reactions to job insecurity related to non-permanent employment are not only determined by individual factors, but are also dependent on how the organisations treat their employees. Wider societal and organisational factors affect employee performance indirectly (see van Veldhoven and Bekkei, 2015). These factors should be taken into account when examining how the heterogeneous group of temporary employees feel, think and act under the conditions of unstable and insecure work.

However, the relationship between temporary working conditions, temporary employees' experiences and work-related performance has not been widely explored in empirical studies. There is a huge amount of research on how job insecurity affects employees' health and wellbeing (for a review and meta-analysis, see Cheng and Chan, 2008; Sverke et al., 2002). Some, however less attention has been paid to the relationships between job insecurity and employees' work-related performance (e.g., Abramis, 1994; Callea, Urbini and Chirumbolo, 2016; Chirumbolo and Areni, 2005; Chirumbolo and Hellgren, 2003; Ellingson, Gruys and Sackett, 1998; Probst, 2002; Selenko et al., 2013; Stynen, Forrier and De Witte, 2015). Other characteristics of temporary employment besides job insecurity have not received similar attention. In this article, I scrutinise how fixed-term employment contracts, associated employment relationship characteristics, and organisational practices relate to employee performance as a process. In other words, I explore how temporary employees themselves describe engaging – and being enabled to engage – in their day-to-day work activities under the varying conditions of fixed-term work assignments and associated organisational practices. According to Clinton and colleagues (2011), non-permanent work has a number of temporal features, which it may be vital to consider in order to understand the experiences of temporary employees. However, as the writers point out, the potential influence of these temporal aspects has remained largely unnoticed in models concerning non-permanent employees' behaviours. In this article, I focus on the specific temporal feature characteristic of temporary work: anticipatory orientation. Temporal employment arrangements can be seen as evoking a specific kind of anticipatory orientation, which entails simultaneous orientation towards the future and intensification of the present (see Ehrenstein, 2006). The focus of this study is on the effects of this temporal aspect, not on the more widely explored individual effects of the perceived insecurity or insecurity itself as a job stressor (see for example Gilboa et al., 2008). While the idea of 'anticipated future' may not be widely utilised in empirical research, it features in multiple work-related theories (Clinton et al., 2011).

Groups other than temporary employees within the workforce also face uncertainties and vulnerabilities stemming from working life (Burgess and Connell, 2015). This is especially true when straightforward, lifelong employment can no longer be expected by anyone (Beck, 2000; Ross, 2009). Therefore, the possibility of future employment changes and losses must be considered and prepared for, regardless of employment status. However, temporary employment and fixed-term contracts in particular intensify the need to foresee the future due to the limited time-span of the current work assignment. Anticipatory orientation towards the future – including some kind of a mental image about possible futures and possible future selves – affects the present by guiding the way we relate to ourselves, to our work, and to collective contexts (see Müller, 2014). The present is 'taken over by the future', which may lead to a sort of 'exploitation of the self' (Ehrenstein, 2006). According to Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos (2008: 233), this self-exploitation happens when people try to anticipate the future through its dissemination into the present. Simultaneously, they confront the need to step up their attempts in order to stay competitive in the future. In their study of employee wellbeing and temporary employment, Lewchuk, Clarke and de Wolff (2008) discovered that uncertainty related to a person's employment relationship was associated with poorer health only when individuals faced uncertain employment scenarios and simultaneously felt the urge to expend effort to minimise this uncertainty. Those in uncertain situations, but still not spending time and energy anticipating the future by securing future employment, reported health outcomes similar to those in permanent full-time employment (Lewchuk, Clarke and de Wolff, 2008). These findings suggest that there is something noteworthy in temporary employment relationships, which are specially marked by the need for anticipatory acts conducted while simultaneously performing at work.

The clear majority of empirical studies concerning the individual and organisational consequences of temporary employment are based on statistical data. There seems to be a notable lack of in-depth qualitative inquiries into how conditions defining temporary employment, such as anticipatory orientation, are experienced and dealt with by temporary employees, and how these conditions relate to employee performance. These kinds of exploratory studies would be useful in terms of bringing novel insights to the theme and building research designs that are more comprehensive. This is particularly important since the research results concerning, for example, the relationship between temporary employment/job insecurity and performance are rather mixed (De Cuyper et al., 2008; Selenko et al., 2014; Sverke et al., 2006; Wang, Lu and Siu, 2015). In addition, since the temporal features of non-permanent work in relation to performance remain understudied, there is space for a data-driven exploratory study. This kind of study could open up avenues for further research, including theory building and theory testing.

The interview data used in this particular study was not originally designed for the purposes of scrutinising performance. Interviewees were not asked to explicate let alone rate their job performances but rather to produce open-ended accounts of their experiences as temporary workers. This is a rather unconventional approach to analysing performance, however, such an open approach creates fruitful grounds for inductive data analysis, where the focus is on temporary employees' own accounts. Due to the exploratory nature of this inquiry, no particular theoretical approach to employee performance (or

simply 'performance') is introduced here. The findings of other empirical studies are used in the final stage of the data analysis in order to bring depth and validation to the observations, and are presented throughout the 'Emerging themes' section of this article. Additionally, some conceptual clarifications may be made. Initially the focus of this study is on a process aspect of performance. The term process aspect refers to what people do while at work, instead of the outcome aspect, which refers to the consequences/results of the individual's behaviour (see Roe, 1999; Sonnentag and Frese, 2002: 5). Performance is approached as something embedded in the various everyday acts and thoughts of temporary employees. Secondly, numerous factors can be seen as influencing performance, such as those related to the task, to the status of the person, and to social and organisational features (see Roe, 1999). Performance is always influenced by characteristics of the situation in which the performance occurs (Sonnentag, Volmer and Spychala, 2008). This study focuses on these characteristics instead of the individual features, especially in terms of anticipatory orientation as a complex environmentally-situational factor that interplays with organisational factors. In addition, the possible effects of the larger societal and cultural environment, often excluded from studies of individual performance, are taken into account in the analysis.

It is also acknowledged that, for example, different kinds of knowledge workers – highly represented amongst the participants of this study – form a specific group in regard to performance. According to Yao and Fan (2015), knowledge workers are characterised by the pursuit of job autonomy, diversification and innovation. In this context, performance is difficult to measure and distinct (Yao and Fan, 2015). For the purposes of the data-analysis, different aspects of performance can be identified. Performance is often related to task performance, citizenship behaviours, and counterproductive work behaviours (e.g., Rotundo and Sackett, 2002). Task performance refers to the proficiency with which core job tasks are performed, while citizenship behaviour contributes to the goal of the organisation indirectly, by contributing to its social, psychological (Rotundo and Sackett, 2002) and organisational environment (see Koopmans et al., 2011). Counterproductive behaviour can be seen as voluntary behaviour that harms the wellbeing of the organisation (Rotundo and Sackett, 2002). Overall, the aim of this study is to approach employee performance as a multidimensional process, involving complex micro-level interfaces with other work-related phenomena. Within employee performance, anticipatory acts can occur simultaneously with the present day-to-day work activities. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between these seemingly conflicting acts and efforts.

In the following sections of the article, there is first an overview of the interview data utilised in the analysis, and a description of the thematic analysis performed. After that, four emerging themes are introduced, each with their own section. In these sections I present the results of the study and suggest that the relationship between employee performance and the anticipatory orientation characteristic in fixed-term employment can be approached through following themes: already sliding elsewhere, regulating and hiding emotions, detaching oneself from work, and adjusting to earn a place. These themes are scrutinised in the context of the particular employment relationship characteristics and specific organisational practices in order to illuminate the situational aspects of performance. So that the reader can form a contextualised picture of the interpretations, these sections include plenty of quotations from the original interview data. In the last sections of the article, I summarise the key findings of the study, discuss its limits and strengths, and offer insights for further inquiries.

Data and Methods

The data consist of 30 open-ended interviews retrieved from the Finnish Social Science Data Archive. The interviews were originally carried out by Leinikki (TJS Study Centre) (2009a) for her doctoral thesis, in which she analysed the forming of the occupational identity of well-educated fixed-term employees. The Finnish Social Data Archive granted permission to use the data in this particular study. Twenty-three of the interviewees were women and seven of them men. Twenty-three were aged 30–45; four were aged 25–29 and three over 45 years. The interviewees were well-educated, all holding at least a lower university degree. They worked in project-based jobs in diverse fields of research, education, and cultural services. In addition, health care professionals such as nurses and midwives were also represented. All of them had fixed-term employment contracts. In order to find participants, Leinikki (2009b) used a snowball method and internet announcements placed on the webpages of trade unions. According to Leinikki (2009a, 2009b), the principal aim of the interviews was to find out how being a fixed-term employee is experienced and on what basis and in what ways their professional identity is constructed. This was approached with questions about general working life, specified further if necessary. After the initial interviews based on a more structured question pattern, the interviews were based on one question: 'You have experiences of working as a fixed-term employee, can you tell me about it?' The interviews lasted for between one and three hours, and were transcribed by a professional tranbscriber. One interview was carried out as a written narrative (Leinikki, 2009b).

The interviewees can be differentiated roughly in relation to their employment situation. Many of them had been working for the same organisation for a long period, and proceeded in their career in a fairly linear way. This was characteristic of researchers; work was often project-based and dependent on external funding. For some people, projects followed each other smoothly, while for others transitions involved greater degrees of uncertainty. Those working in the public healthcare sector formed a specific group, the members of which had a clear job description and usually a strong professional identity. The majority worked on fairly short-term, serial fixed-term employment contracts. Especially in the early stages of their careers, the situation was perceived as temporary

and sometimes as the individual's own choice. However, in many cases, the interviewees felt that they were unwillingly stuck with fixed-term contracts.

I had analysed the interview data (in addition to other thematic interviews not used in this study) at first as a part of another, larger research project concerning agency in precarious work (see Åkerblad, 2014). I had, therefore, completed the first phases of the analysis, including elements such as data familiarisation, beforehand. I had approached the data with holistic and hermeneutical reading in order to both get an overall impression and find some preliminary patterns. For the purposes of this particular inquiry, I analysed the data by means of a focused thematic analysis (see Braun and Clarke, 2006). I arranged the data by themes, which seemed to capture something significant, especially from the point of view of the research task at hand: how fixed-term employment contracts, associated employment relationship characteristics, and organisational practices relate to employee performance as a process. These themes – appearing relevant in order to describe and understand the relationship between anticipatory orientation and performance – form the core data of this study. Overall, my aim was not to describe all of the data and themes, but to focus on the themes relevant to the purposes of this study, and perform a more detailed analysis of these. Thus, the fairly large data corpus – all the data collected for a particular research project – was reduced to a more manageable data set – all the data from the corpus that is being used for a particular analysis (see Braun and Clarke, 2006). This allowed for a deeper and more detailed analysis. However, the data was not divided by the premises of singular interviews, but by the premises of the themes apparent in the whole data corpus.

After that, I began to compare themes to the observations made in previous empirical studies, thus moving towards a more interpretive approach. I consciously focused on both quantitative and qualitative inquiries in diverse fields of science, in an effort to find both diversity and common ground. Since I did not apply any particular theoretical approach because of the exploratory nature of the study, the findings of other empirical studies served as an informative mirror. Overall, the analysis progressed from the holistic reading to an initial inductive coding phase, from the whole data corpus towards to a reduced data set, and finally to a deductive, interpretative phase. The data-driven and interpretative analysis eventually intertwined in a writing process, which can be defined as the final stage of the analysis. Throughout the whole analysis process, I tried to find and retain the balance between flexibility, openness and coherence, and consistency (see Holloway and Todres, 2003).

Emerging Themes

Already sliding elsewhere

In temporary employment, the time horizon of the current employment contract is limited and thus preparations for the individual's future exit and/or the renewal of the contract have to be made. While doing daily tasks, the employee must explore forthcoming options and pave the path for the next opportunity. This means that they are both in practice – such as surfing on the internet for available jobs – and mentally – such as innovating new opportunities – already sliding elsewhere. As de Cuyper and colleagues (2008) state, employee performance may be compromised towards the end of a temporary employment contract. Temporary employees begin a process of disengagement, during which they refocus their energies towards job search behaviour (see also Clinton et al., 2011). In these circumstances they begin to experience a certain degree of restlessness (see also Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008: 235). This restlessness has an impact on both directions of the time-continuum. On the one hand, the present task interferes with future planning, whilst simultaneously the preparations for the future draw concentration away from the present moment. As one interviewee put it: 'If financing (equalling continuation of the employment contract) is always on hold and there is a strong degree of uncertainty about the future, it's really difficult to keep your thoughts together. And overall being able to do your tasks in a way that you can also focus on innovating new projects'. As the citation shows, this insecurity about the future means intensified and conflicting requirements and constantly sliding from one focus point to another. Thoughts break apart and task-related performing becomes more energy-consuming. As in the situation of the cited interviewee, these conflicts become especially intense when the employee has some control over the continuance of the employment contract. Paradoxically, this hint of control creates extra pressure to concentrate on current responsibilities, while simultaneously innovating upcoming projects.

Restlessness may go along with decreasing work motivation. At the end of the fixed-term (especially project-based) employment contract, employees often silently refuse to take on any extra workload. Input is gradually diminished and energy saved for future projects. According to Clark (2005), subjective job dependency acts as a moderator of job insecurity and affects both temporary and permanent employees the same way: the more insecure and the less dependent the employee is, the lower their contextual performance. A decrease in work motivation can be felt to be justified and even accompanied by a sort of defiance, especially in cases where the employee would have liked a more permanent contract or at least a new fixed-term position. It could be said that if the contract is not being renewed against all the odds, it indicates that the employee in question's contribution has not been noticed and/or appreciated. If so, they have every right to save their energy, to not take on anything extra, and to not commit themselves to long-term organisational goals. There can also be signs of cynicism present (see also Atkinson, 2013). It has been noted that the more the employees perceive injustice and job insecurity as arising from the workplace, the more they might respond by exhibiting negative attitudes (Salami, 2010). When the employment contract is coming to an end and/or the employee is a short-term substitute without resources of power, demands that they participate in, for example, the organisation's strategy planning may evoke intense feelings of frustration:

> 'But when there's the end point, you are kind of leaving. And maybe, then you can't really take a place there properly, but on the other hand you don't have to take it. You can think that if something is wrong here, should I try to make a difference or not? The problem is, then, that if I would like to make a difference, my position is that of the one being kicked out or the one leaving.'

Repeated instances of a complete depletion of energy and aiming focus towards new destinations may be accompanied by feelings of frustration and tiredness. These feelings seem to arise from the fact that anticipatory orientation fragments both thoughts and practices, making it hard to concentrate and commit to the current performance, despite the employees' wishes. The difficulty in committing is not due to an intrinsic restlessness characteristic of a 'new, flexible worker'. Restless employees in this study are not nomadic, self-oriented workers searching for new career opportunities for personal fulfilment. Restlessness is, in many cases, an unwanted and stressful condition dictated by the limited time-span of the employment contract. For the temporary employee, it is impossible to commit to the current moment because of the constant need to anticipate and make both mental and practical preparations for the future. They must adapt to being unattached, and save some of the vigour for smoothing future transitions. This can be experienced as 'tough' and 'burdensome', as one interviewee described:

> 'What is the downside of being a temp? Well, at least when there were these short contracts, it was really tough. So I won't [do that] anymore – well, except maybe in a case of a truly interesting one – take on temporary jobs. But I don't change jobs easily, because it was so burdensome. That's why I took this job here now, because I got tired of it. Then, of course, the work motivation suffers terribly when the contract is ending and you don't know [what lies ahead]. This was the case with me at least. I think that employers shouldn't keep hiring temps. Since then all I do is surf online looking for available jobs, filling in job applications and trying to avoid. On the other hand, you can't take any projects anyway. It was somehow really frustrating and in a way generally depressing.'

As the quote shows, being repeatedly forced to shift the focus away from the present moment can become a tiring and even depressing cycle. Individuals are impelled to 'avoid'. This is due not only the lack of motivation, but for pragmatic reasons: there is no point in taking on any new projects that would inevitably remain unfinished. The need to remain employable and adaptive can create fairly mixed and conflicting emotional states. On the one hand, you can find pride in adapting and surviving, while on the other hand the tiring nature of the survival game is being recognised: 'And when you have seen it: hey, I can get those jobs, I'm able to take them over quickly and I'm able to adapt. I have something in my personality that makes it easy. Or it has been easy, but I'm getting tired of it now. In a way, you know that you'll survive'. People may settle for a job that offers fewer challenges or is otherwise less satisfactory, but provides more stability and thus helps them to break free from the spiral of fatigue and frustration induced by constant anticipation and preparation.

One way to soothe the restlessness and support functional capacity in the present is to shorten the time perspective, consciously isolating the future from the present. People live day to day, project to project, avoiding even thinking about the future: 'I don't know, I can't think. I go in kind of periods'. In Atkinson's (2013) study, people working on easily terminated contracts, without resources of power or having a very fragmented work history, saw the future as something over which they have no control. According to Atkinson (2013: 655), in this kind of situation a sort of 'adaptive presentism or gradualism' manifests – for example living 'for the moment', 'for the now', 'for the day'. This kind of orientation is evident in the reply one interviewee gave to a query about her/his future plans regarding working life: 'I don't really want, I don't think. I don't think about the future a lot. I don't know if it's due to this, not necessarily only due to this, I'm just the sort of person who doesn't think about the future. Or I don't really like to think about it, because I know it never goes as I thought it would'. Since the sense of the present is intensified, this 'live in the moment' orientation is one adaptation strategy available – despite the fact that orientation may not be easy (see Jokinen, 2015: 12). A sort of mental relief may also be accomplished by 'engaging' uncertainty, rather than attempting to control it (see Honkasalo, 2008). However, these strategies have their recognised downsides: living in the moment, resisting the urge to anticipate – or lacking the resources for anticipation – can have detrimental effects on a person's future career transitions. Still, these strategies may be embraced as securing concentration and thus high-level performance conditions at the present time. In a way, the employee's current performance is being prioritised over avoiding the individualised employment risk of 'not anticipating'.

Regulating and hiding emotions

Near the end of a fixed-term contract, people are forced to deal with lowering work motivation and restlessness, and simultaneously forced to adjust the way they express these attitudes and affective states at the workplace. They must pretend to be fully committed while actively seeking and innovating opportunities to come, and channelling their energies and loyalties to new locations. According to Weiskopf and Loacker (2003: 17), people have to internalise tensions inherent in the 'network world of projects' and accept the requirements that come with it as quasi-natural: the obligation to demonstrate commitment and passion for the current project, but at the same time save energy for the next; to be involved and to have an eye elsewhere. The quasi-naturalness of these requirements may evoke conflicts between work-related emotions and actual working conditions. One interviewee describes the need to monitor and regulate emotions in the workplace when

the end of a fixed-term contract is approaching and there is no affirmation concerning the interviewee's participation in future projects. Without this affirmation, there is a forced emotional withdrawal from the work and the work community, despite still being a part of it. The interviewer asked how being a temp felt and how it has influenced the interviewee's know-how and professional development. The interviewee replied:

> 'It has, of course, constantly brought a kind of … especially when this work is the kind that requires perseverance and where you should be oriented towards the future all the time. You are managing the work at hand, but at the same time you must plan two, even three years to come. So, planning always felt terribly difficult … All the time you felt like who are you to say, because you might not be here. It felt bad when you got kind of excited and began to say … Like next autumn's project, in a way a bigger project in which I was involved and enthusiastically planning … It felt really bad when it was left unfinished.'

The individual cannot legitimately become excited and enthusiastic about forthcoming projects because of the vulnerability of their position. Emotions can be saved, with interest and excitement 'drawn back' and retained for future purposes. Interesting enough, one psychosocial work factor found to be associated with poor employee well-being is the demand for emotions to be hidden (Schütte et al., 2014). In the context of fixed-term contracts, these demands are related to the restricted and obscured time-span, which forces employees to anticipate loss and a lack of involvement while performing, thus detaching themselves. Hiding negative emotions can also be seen as a form of 'impression management', aimed at increasing temporary employees' chances of being offered a permanent job (see Chen and Fang, 2008; De Cuyper et al., 2014). Despite hiding 'improper' emotional states and attitudes considered potentially self-harming, people may try to actually feel and think in a 'proper' way. Modifying your orientation can become constant emotion work. According to Hochschild (1998), through emotion work we are trying to feel emotions that we are not per se experiencing, or trying to suffocate the emotions we interpret as 'inappropriate' in a specific context. Emotion work involves constant adjustment of the relationship between our 'own' and 'fabricated' emotions (Hochschild, 1998).

As one interviewee described, a temporary employee must intentionally adapt to the same orientation as a permanent worker, take a trusting and committed stance towards the future: 'In a way you have to do the work with a committed and forward-looking mindset. You can't really do it in a way like "I'm just working here and the contract is coming to an end soon". You have to position yourself as you were a permanent employee'. This kind of positioning is neither achieved nor maintained by itself, but instead requires constant evaluating and adjusting. The previous interviewee continues: 'But it is, of course, it takes a lot of energy; I have to keep on checking my own attitude. You cannot simply be'. What this 'simply being' actually means becomes apparent when the narrator goes on: 'That I just would know that this is this job and I'll take care of this task, but I have to keep myself upright in it'. Keeping yourself 'upright' is active work requiring the capacity to comprehend what staying upright socially means, in what contexts it is required and through what actions and gestures it can be expressed. All this emotional-social-cognitive work comes in addition to the current core performance; 'taking care of tasks', to quote the interviewee, and thus is experienced as a stressor. This highlights the often-dismissed point that work-related performance is repeatedly accompanied by emotions, and regulation of emotional states affects performance (Roe, 1999).

Detachment from work

There are serious conflicts between the timeframe of the employee's presence in the organisation (i.e. their employment contract), and the timeframe that the assignment fundamentally requires. These conflicts are related to the forced detachment from the work, thus eroding the conditions required for performance. Many of the interviewees were employed in fields of work where perseverance and long-term commitment are the key elements of high-level performance. Particularly in care work and other types of work involving long-term client-employee relationships, the fragmentation of time appears problematic. In care work vital information about the care recipient's habits and preferences is built through continuity and long-term relationships. Care giving is much more than performing a certain task in a certain moment (Ede and Rantakeisu, 2015). Furthermore, many of the interviewees worked in creative academic projects, where the unique way of performing and the performance outcomes are inseparable from the employee's persona. When the time horizon is restricted contrary to the requirements of the work, employees feel unable to perform as well as they could in other conditions. This results in lowered work motivation as the experience of meaningful work is eroded, and emotional detachment from the work. In many cases the interviewees had been involved in innovating and launching a project that they could not implement completely – or in some cases, not even reach a level close to completion. As the next data citation shows, these conditions eat away the experience of the employee's 'own inner credibility'. Simultaneously, the personal attributes described by the interviewee are built up during the individual's unique life span – 'experience, insight, education', and 'social networks' – become nullified. The interviewer asked: 'I'm interested in how the temporary work feels, where it shows, is there concrete harm?' The answer was as follows:

> 'It's a kind of insecurity. In a way, it eats away your own inner credibility or such. When I'm doing expert work, I'm doing it based on my own experience, insight, education. Someone else would do this work differently. I plan it on the bases I have. So, it is to some extent also a personal project, and people also – I talked about these social networks – are involved. It is not impersonal, it is not

> detachable from it. This is the way I have justified it. And now I'm motivating people to participate in a process, and I don't know whether I will be a part of it at the end. It's pretty tricky in a way.'

When employment contracts are excessively and unjustifiably short-term in relation to the requirements of high-quality job performance, work can be sometimes performed just 'well enough'. As one interviewee stated: 'As a temp, I still have enthusiasm and interest, but the working life conditions piss me off greatly. You absolutely won't agree to just anything. You may agree on two-year projects, but you'll do it well enough, not to your fullest'. However, performing 'well enough' is not experienced as satisfactory, especially when it becomes a permanent state. It carries forced detachment and instrumental orientation towards the work, which do not promote job satisfaction or organisational productivity and creativity. According to Melin and Mamia (2007: 142–143), Finns have a expressive work orientation, meaning that work is intrinsically important. Therefore, from the perspective of wellbeing at work, how well employees feel they have succeeded in their duties is crucial. Padavic (2005: 111) in turn argues that some contingent workers work even harder than the objective incentive system warrants because their identities and self-respect are tied to the immaculate work performance and the 'good worker' ideology characteristic of a Fordist relationship. Thus, it is important to note that the need to perform well is not only instrumental; a means to achieve a permanent position within the organisation or enhance future employability. It is anchored in personal and professional ethics, and connected to wider societal and cultural norms.

A similar sense of 'performing well enough' may also manifest in conditions where a temporary position is combined with the desperate need to stay employed in order to survive economically, socially and/or to ensure future employability. When forced to take on projects marked by poor working conditions – including an insufficient timeframe – an employee may do 'what is required' but keep a certain emotional distance. The employee anticipates, often based on previous experiences, that the timespan offered will not be enough to do anything besides what is strictly necessary. One interviewee was asked: 'Does this temporality of work have any consequences for the way work can be done?' S/he responded:

> 'There were these one-year projects, in which you didn't exactly think that you should do anything extra, so to speak. If you are told to find out why red is red, you'll find out why red is red – though you would like to examine why water is wet. You don't have the time, you don't bother, if it's a one-year thing and you have to find the cause of the redness. And when you have figured that out, then you hope to get some more financing so you can find out the reason for blueness, for example. Maybe hope that someday you might be able to reflect on why water is wet.'

A lack of energy and drive can also hinder self-developmental activities, which could both benefit the organisation and enhance the employee's future employability. Very short-term and/or serial employment contracts create an energy-consuming, non-supportive environment that intensifies the present. Thus, preparations for the future are not made, since there is little to no vigour left to do anything besides what is acutely needed in order to perform at the present moment: 'Yes, it has clearly influenced the fact I had no energy to develop my own professional know-how besides what was needed for the job. Nothing extra, things that would've been pretty useful, it felt like there was no energy left for that'.

Adjusting to earn a place

Serial fixed-term contracts seem to create particular conditions, often marked by both a fragmented time horizon and hope for future stability. Many of the interviewees had been working in the same organisation for years, their short-term contracts repeatedly renewed. The renewal of fixed-term employment contracts was usually desired by the interviewees, in the hope that the contract would be eventually turned into a permanent one. In addition, every single contract guarantees economic survival for a period of time, and provides slightly more work experience, which could enhance future employment possibilities. Contract expectations seem to play an important role in employee experience and performance (see also Bernhard-Oettel et al., 2013). A lack of resources combined with hope for continuity generates a specific position within the work community. This position involves the need to observe the surroundings intensively. Temporary employees must monitor the gestures of others, especially those with direct or indirect power over the employee's future prospects. There is often a lack of open communication between the employee and the supervisor, which can make the future seem ever vaguer. Affirmative information about the renewal of the employment contract may not be communicated until at the very final stage of the current contract. Thus, the employee has to constantly analyse what verbal and nonverbal messages from the superiors mean from the point of view of the employee's future position. The more straightforward and clear the communication is perceived to be, the less the situation calls for observation and interpretation. When the communication remains ambiguous, the employee has to read and interpret even the smallest social gestures as 'cues' in order to build some degree of predictability. Folkman (2010) writes about the relationship between stress, coping and hope. As she states, 'uncertainty can provide a fertile milieu for doubts based on what one hears, sees, reads, or imagines' (Folkman, 2010: 904). Under the organisational conditions of serial fixed-term contracts, these persistent doubts can affect employees' performance.

The interviewees try to act on the basis of their observations in a way that guarantees future continuity. This means accommodating themselves and their actions according to the signals. People try to keep their performance at as high a level as possible, so as not to give any

justified reason to deny them a permanent position or at least a renewed fixed-term contract. As de Cuyper and colleagues (2010) state, temporary employees may also want to show their value to the organisation when under strain as a form of 'impression management', and with a view to increasing their chances of being offered a permanent job. Interviewees also attempt to present themselves as 'nice' and 'pleasant' workers and co-workers as a part of the performance. Actions are marked by a certain degree of caution. The vulnerability of the employee's position combined with the intense hope for future stability affect how work-related developmental needs and ideas can be raised within the organisation. According to Schreurs and others (2015), perceived job insecurity acts as a hindrance stressor, making employees reluctant to speak up, especially in high-stakes situations. Serial fixed-term contracts create circumstances where, from the point of view of the employee, stakes are continuously high. One interviewee reflected:

> 'And this whole unit now, I could have provided plenty of good insights on what it would be useful to develop here. But somehow, it's like in a unit meeting or somewhere, it feels like I don't dare, as I'm quite keen on saying something. Then I wonder if that was too much. The boss looks nervous and so on'.
>
> Interviewer: 'You observe quite carefully, how what you are saying is being reacted to?'
>
> 'Yeah, or I watch quite carefully, what I dare to say. Because I'm usually pretty good at pointing things out, so I try to watch out here, making sure not to say absolutely everything I think.'

'Nice' employees blend into the work surroundings like a chameleon, and avoid conflicts and standing out. However, in order to achieve a permanent position within the organisation, employees should be perceived as irreplaceable and thus should not fade into the background completely. This is a paradox from the point of view of 'impression management' (see Chen and Fang, 2008; De Cuyper et al., 2014). As Weiskopf and Loacker (2006: 411) point out, one characteristic feature of the 'world of projects' is the paradoxical demand that employees are simultaneously unique and adaptable. Intensive monitoring of others and being chameleon-like diminishes and masks this uniqueness, thus giving an impression of being easily replaceable. At the same time, it weakens the opportunities to utilise personalised abilities and competencies in current performance and work-related interaction.

There are also critical and ironic voices in the interviews when dealing with the ideal of a 'nice' employee. Some of the interviewees believe that the work-related problems they have faced (including fixed-term contracts not being renewed) are due to them being 'not nice enough'. Usually these employees had openly voiced views about the defects related to their position, and sometimes tried to solve problems by involving a third party (like a trade union or occupational safety health district). 'Nice' employees seem to be characterised as people who are not eager to protect 'selfish' interests and do not criticise 'their own', i.e. the organisation and its members and practices. On the other hand, kindness and pleasantness (without the quotation marks) are determined in relation to socially accepted, unwritten rules of workplace interaction. It seems clear that the motives of working hard and being a nice colleague and employee are complex and mixed in temporary employment conditions (see also Padavic, 2005). One interviewee had been working in the same organisation on serial fixed-term contracts, and described a sense of having 'slipped smoothly' into the work community and in a way becoming 'addicted' to it. There was a sense of control over the future, accomplished by performing and interacting in a certain way. Though the interviewer tried (with a slightly ironic tone) to propose the 'cheerful' and 'brisk' employee ideal, the bait was not taken. Actions are reflected in relation to socially accepted rules of interaction and mutual trust. The interviewee believed that by controlling their job performance ('not messing up') and way of interaction ('being her/himself'), trust could be earned and their place claimed.

> 'It's kind of expected that I will have a job here in the future. You just have to rely on it. If they for some reason suddenly say that I have messed things up, and [that I have] to get out, then it's my mistake. Then I've messed things up. In a way, you can be confident when doing your job well and so there will be a job. If you are the kind of colleague who isn't dismissive and doesn't worsen the work atmosphere like that'.
>
> Interviewer: 'It's important to be cheerful and brisk?'
>
> 'Yes, but it is, of course, no-one always has a good day and so on. Everyone has those bad days too. And if you are being yourself and that kind of thing, then maybe you can earn their trust. And they will think, well, okay, that one is a pretty decent colleague, it's nice to work with you.'

While aspiring to claim a place within the work community, the interviewee actively promotes the organisation's performance by showing organisational citizenship behaviour. When an employee does not 'mess things up' and interacts in a way that makes them 'nice to work with', they simultaneously promote the cooperation between agents and keep up the good spirit in the workplace. According to Feldman (2006), contingent employees who aspire to obtain permanent employment are likely to be more motivated to engage in organisational citizenship behaviour and to produce higher quality work and a higher quantity of it. Adjusting seems to be a form of organisational citizenship behaviour available to temporary employees – and is, at the same time, particularly compulsory. However, openly voicing opinions, even productive ones, and active participation may be challenging. Uncertainty about their own future position can produce experiences of 'outsiderness', which limit possibilities and weaken the desire to practise organisational citizenship behaviour related to long-term organisational

development. 'Outsiderness' is associated with a need for caution and withdrawal. Temporary employees may feel like constant strangers in the workplace (see also Garsten, 1999; Winkler and Mahmood, 2015). On the other hand, 'outsiderness' offers a protective distance from, for example, internal workplace disputes. Simultaneously, this involves withdrawal from the centre of the community, which again is problematic from the view of future inclusion. In addition, 'outsiderness' carries detachment as described in the previous chapter, which may affect performance and corrode work motivation.

In the context of serial fixed-term contracts, various 'promises' seem to float in the air. These promises are often symbolic and vague: when you 'do the right thing' or 'are the right kind', rewards will follow in the form of future continuity and inclusion. These promises can leave the employee stuck in a burdensome situation characterised by intense anticipation and dependency. In this liminal state between temporary and permanent employment, the employee's means of control are severely limited and optional career moves blurred: they can be 'hanging onto a single thought', as one interviewee described. This kind of liminal state is found to be typical of temporary workers in agency firms (Garsten, 1999; Winkler and Mahmood, 2015). However, serial fixed-term contracts reinforce the bond between the employee and a singular employer, which is not always the case in temporary agency work. Employees working on serial fixed-term contracts are typically replacements for permanent employees. When new vacancies open up, those who have proven themselves as substitutes have a head start. Thus it often feels like a case of waiting your turn, which should come someday – but this is not absolutely certain.

The state of anticipation carries an expectation about the employee's efforts being sufficient to improve the future. However, if this expectation fails to materialise, intense feelings of being treated unjustly and even abused may be evoked (see also Padavic, 2005). According to Feldman and Turnley (2004), when facing inconsistency between actual and desired employment continuance, a temporary employee may develop feelings of 'relative deprivation'. This can be understood as causing tension in someone who perceives a difference between the way things are and the way things were expected to be (Bolino and Turnley, 2009). The organisation has been able to ferret out and take advantage of both the employee's high-level performance and social sensitivity, pushing them all the way to the border of paranoia, but has left promises unfulfilled on its part. This can even be experienced as a nullification of the employee's whole persona, and accompanied by feelings of depression and worthlessness. What seems to be finally rewarded is random and/or something that the employee could not have influenced in the first place. Working in a special way – for example providing care work 'wholeheartedly' – can prove to not be enough: 'But yes, I get a feeling of being fooled a bit … When at the very least I did the work wholeheartedly. And then you're suddenly told that you aren't needed'. In addition to the organisational level, promises can be more general cultural assurances, such as hard work will always pay off. As Padavic (2005: 129) points out, the labour relations of Fordism may exist in the consciousness of workers trying to adapt to new 'flexible' working relations. People may expect the 'old' ideals to be rewarded: doing work diligently, 'wholeheartedly' and acting loyally. However, these may not equal the qualifications of a modern, mobile worker who sells instrumentally one's workforce and does not expect or even desire permanency as a reward.

Discussion

In an effort to elucidate the complex relationship between temporary employment and employee performance, I focused on the context of the characteristic of a restricted time horizon in fixed-term employment contracts. As the data analysis shows, forced anticipatory orientation – a necessity for predicting the future and preparing for it at the cost of the present – relates to performance in several ways. Four emerging themes were identified from the interview data: already sliding elsewhere, regulating and hiding emotions, detachment from work, and adjusting to earn a place. Being forced to begin subtly looking elsewhere while trying to fulfil current work responsibilities is associated with feelings of restlessness, a lack of concentration and deteriorating work motivation. The need to regulate and hide emotions is linked to forced avoidance and demands for 'fabricated' commitment. Detachment from work is due to the anticipated loss, since fixed-term employees are required to prepare their future exit from the workplace and adapt their attitudes, emotions and behaviours according to the position of 'soon-to-be outsider'. If the restricted time span hinders the possibility of high-level performance, thus making it impossible to do the work the way it inherently requires, using one's own personal view and a holistic presence, an instrumental and technical approach may be the only one available. Serial fixed-term employment contracts create specific conditions, often marked by a mixture of limited resources of power and a hope for future stability. Employees monitor other members of the work community, interpret vague social cues and adjust themselves according to their observations in order to earn their place in the organisation. They may avoid any contradictions and even voicing ideas and opinions concerning the work environment. When hard efforts go unrecognised, feelings of resentment and worthlessness may arise. Overall, this study shows the 'minimal' everyday acts that employees perform and the ways they feel and express their feelings under conditions of uncertainty, which may remain undiscovered in survey-based studies.

Regardless of employees being unquestionably able and competent in what they do, thus having full performance capacity and willingness, the conditions for using this capacity may be impaired in temporary employment, especially in the context of excessively short-term employment contracts and harmful organisational practices. There is a lack of a critical job resource: a logical time horizon in harmony with the nature of the work. When this resource is lacking, several micro-level deficiencies follow as described in this article. This can be considered a main finding of this study. It is not only about the concern over

losing one's job or overall insecurity about the future, but the experience of not being able to perform at a self-satisfactory level because of the missing resources and the stress this causes. According to Sonnentag and Frese (2002: 4), performing at a high level can be a source of satisfaction, accompanied by feelings of mastery and pride, while underachieving can be experienced at the very least as dissatisfying or even as a personal failure. Effects of anticipatory orientation – constant balancing of current tasks and future-planning, conflicts between 'long-term' work-related emotions and 'short-term' working conditions, and fighting for a sense of autonomy – influence performance at both ends of the time continuum. Forced anticipation not only affects present performance, but if it becomes chronic, can result in a lowered sense of professional competence and ability. According to Roe (1999: 236), performing tasks and producing outcomes evaluated as 'good' or 'bad' has an impact on workers' knowledge, skills, motivation and self-image and in the long run on the worker's personality, competencies and health. In the context of this study, the key issue is not how performance is evaluated by a supervisor or any other party, but how it is evaluated by the employee her/himself.

While temporary employees seem to be more than willing to ensure high-level performance, many organisations fail to recognise this urge. Specific characteristics of temporary employment relationships and organisational practices define and differentiate the conditions of satisfactory performance, thus dividing temporary employees. Simultaneously, these features define the conditions, which can either enhance or hinder the employee's experience of becoming recognised as a unique, non-disposable human being. When these micro-level factors are not recognised in research settings, and 'temporary employees' are instead regarded as a homogenous group, mixed results concerning the individual impacts of temporary employment begin to make sense. Complications seem to arise especially when the project-based model of work is introduced by force to areas of work where a long-term personal presence and involvement are the key elements of performance. These areas include different kinds of care and client-based work and creative professional work, where the employee's persona, performance and outcome are inextricably intertwined. In these conditions employees must detach themselves emotionally from the clients/patients and from the work community – or fiercely and tirelessly try to adjust to the prevailing conditions and thus face the individualised threat of work-related exhaustion. This poses a problem especially in the social and health care sector, where fixed-term contracts are particularly common in Finland (see Pärnänen, 2010). As Suonsivu (2003) points out, exhaustion constitutes a risk in care work, especially when the working conditions inhibit the subjective experience of 'work well done' and instead intensify the experience of 'nothing being enough'. It has to be emphasised that these conditions affect women in particular.

Different kind of legislative interventions, such as constrictions on groundless fixed-term contracts, are much needed. However, it seems that the underlying fundamental aspects of these interventions are not always embraced at organisational level. It should be recognised that the negative consequences of temporary employment can be partly controlled through organisational practices. One of these crucial practices seem to be open, fair and well-timed organisational communication (see also Bernhard-Oettel et al., 2013). It enhances the conditions for concentration, commitment and expression of emotions and opinions as an equal member of the work community. It has been noted that temporary workers may seek to win contract extensions at the end of their contracts by enhancing their performance (Clinton et al., 2011). This study shows that when examined closely, this enhancement of performance seems to require not only hard work, but also intensive observation and fine-tuning of behaviour. The strategy of adjustment – the attempt to avoid contradictions and differentiation – may misleadingly seem to heighten the level of organisational cohesion. However, it may actually cause stress to the individual employee, and loss of creative capital to the organisation. Open and clear communication can help to minimise the burdensome experience of being constantly under surveillance, thus allowing spontaneity and creativity to flourish. In addition, open communication seems to enhance the perception of justice. According to Kausto, Lipponen and Elovainio (2005: 433), the perceived fairness of procedures and treatment may serve as a substantial organisational resource for facing the challenges of the job. In a study conducted by Wang, Lu and Siu (2015), job insecurity was found to be negatively correlated to job performance, except in cases where there are high levels of organisational justice.

Limitations and strengths

This study is qualitative and exploratory in nature, and does not, therefore, methodologically offer a basis for generalisations – instead, the aim is to increase understanding about the subject matter. However, certain limitations must be recognised. The interviewees in this study were highly educated and many of them worked in knowledge-intense fields. As Yao and Fan (2015) point out, knowledge workers form a particular group in regard to employee performance. Thus, the results may not apply to different groups of temporary workers. Nevertheless, despite the high level of education, job descriptions and organisational contexts varied considerably among participants: while some were engaged in independent, project-based work (such as researchers), others worked in more traditional, hierarchic organisations and had specific job descriptions (such as midwives). This brings more variety to the data. The recruiting process (e.g. through trade union websites) likely had an impact on the selection of the participants, possibly leading to an emphasis on problematic aspects of temporary work. The data was not originally collected for the purposes of analysing job performance, and this can be perceived both as a disadvantage and a strength. While it ruled out the possibility of utilising a specific theoretical approach from the beginning of the study, it allowed for an open-minded and flexible approach appropriate for exploratory analysis, which aims at opening avenues for

more focused future research designs. Since this study was conducted by a single researcher and based on a single set of data collected beforehand, it does not have the benefits of a methods, data source or analyst triangulation. However, I have used multiple perspectives to interpret the data, thus practising theory/perspective triangulation (see Patton, 1999). Finally, thematic analysis allows for a great deal of flexibility – numerous things could be identified from the data – which has been both a challenge and an advantage (see Braun and Clarke, 2006). An important asset was my deep familiarity with the data, as I had worked with the same interviews in previous research projects. However, due to the specific participant group, the exploratory nature of the study and the flexibility of the method, the descriptions and interpretations offered here are not the only ones possible. They are open to scientific debate and call for further validation and development through future studies.

Conclusions

The results of this exploratory study suggest that in the context of fixed-term employment, anticipatory orientation and employee performance process are intertwined in complex ways. A limited time horizon calls for anticipatory acts, which distract from and 'exploit' the present. This study highlights some avenues for future investigations in the realm of temporary work. Four emerging themes presented in this paper – already sliding elsewhere, regulating and hiding emotions, detachment from work, adjusting to earn a place – could be perceived as possible stressors characteristic of fixed-term employment relationships and studied in more detail as such. This study also implies that in order to understand the rather fuzzy relationship between temporary employment and employee wellbeing, the role of self-satisfactory performance should be acknowledged. Employees find pride and fulfilment in performing well, and when deprived of this opportunity, work-related well-being may be impaired. It would be useful to take a closer look at the conditions defining the experience of 'work well done' in different employment relationships and related organisational practices. The data used in this particular study imply that the role of practices such as open and appropriately timed organisational communication are important, as well as practices aimed at enhancing the experience of organisational justice.

In addition, future studies concerning the links between temporary employment and performance should both recognise the role of emotions and emotion regulation, and the societal and cultural norms they entail. In addition to the individual and organisational perspective, a larger cultural perspective on perceptions of work-related justice could offer fruitful research topics. The data of this study shows that some temporary employees feel stuck in their positions regardless of 'doing all the right things'. The 'cultural promise' implying that education, chronologically accumulated know-how and general hard work will be rewarded with stability and continuity no longer necessarily hold. New forms of work are born, new requirements and expectations arise and thus new kinds of cultural rules take shape – ones that are not yet recognised. It would be valuable to explore how this ambiguity and conflicting cultural rules are connected to both employee performance and work-related well-being. There is a need for multidisciplinary, context-aware studies to find new understandings and enrich insights on work-related performance and temporary work.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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