

# EFFECTS OF TEMPORARY JOB CONTRACTS ON THE WELL-BEING OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS

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Uncertainty, mobility, and opportunity are some of the concepts used to describe work in today's society. Greater economic energy and flexibility have certainly created conditions that enable organizations to be more competitive, but these changes have also given rise to greater uncertainty, instability, and risk for workers, with a subsequent increase in their levels of stress and anxiety. This study aims to investigate the effects of temporary job contracts on the well-being of individuals and organizations, on the basis of an empirical survey on a sample of 106 Italian workers in the tertiary sector. Results show that the type of contract, as well as the possibility of choosing, have effects on personal and organizational variables, such as climate, conflict, perceived organizational support (POS), commitment, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), strain, burnout, and turnover intention. Results are also reported for gender and some organizational well-being/malaise dimensions. Such findings may be useful in developing some management guidelines to foster the sustainability of different forms of employment.

**Key words:** Flexibility; Job insecurity; Organizational disease; Organizational well-being; Temporary work.

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## BACKGROUND

Among the new forms of employment that have emerged in recent years, temporary jobs have certainly become one of the most common. The competitive environment has created the need for organizations to identify the most appropriate and flexible ways to deal with different strategic and operational contingencies. In the last decade, there has been a particularly significant growth in the offer of temporary employment contracts, which allow organizations to use a workforce more flexibly than in the case of conventional open-ended employment contracts.

The economy greater dynamism and flexibility have to be credited with having created the necessary conditions for organizations to become more competitive on the one hand, while generating more opportunities for workers on the other. According to some studies, however, these changes have paved the way to rising levels of insecurity and instability with the conse-

quent burden of anxiety on workers and self-employed workers, especially the less well-trained and competent (Gallino, 2007).

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2007) has recently included, among the new and growing risks to occupational health and safety, new forms of employment contract and the job insecurity that they can create, although temporary work, as we will see later, may also be associated with elements that are positive for both the organization and the individual concerned.

Just as the effects of repetitive, monotonous work — namely maladjustment, demotivation, and worker dissatisfaction — were studied in the past, it is now necessary to focus on occupational uncertainty, variability, and flexibility.

Hence this empirical survey, which aims to better understand the world of temporary workers, who are all too often regarded as an even group, though multiple “categories” of people are involved in these new forms of employment, working on a number of different types of contract, for different reasons, with different levels of acceptance, and different perceptions of their role — differences that profoundly influence their general well-being. This study aims, in particular, to further analyze the influence of the type of employment contract (temporary vs. open-ended), whether or not it was chosen deliberately, whether or not a temporary contract is convertible into a permanent one, and how desirable this option appears, vis-à-vis several personal and organizational variables, such as climate, conflict, perceived organizational support (POS), commitment, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), strain, burnout, and turnover intention. There are therefore many variables involved and their relationships are not always linear. Below is a summary of key developments in the specialist literature, that served as the starting point of this investigation.

### Subjective and Objective Occupational Uncertainty

It is well known that, among the more salient features of temporary employment, there is a low sense of security. According to Kraimer, Wayne, Liden, and Sparrowe (2005), perceived occupational security is a vast psychological construct, defined as the workers’ expectation that their working relationship with the organization will continue into the future. Mauno, Kinnunen, Mäkikangas, and Nätti (2005) considered perceived job insecurity as people’s subjective estimate of the probability of losing their jobs. This also has to do with objective circumstances, such as corporate strategy, the situation on the labor market, or having a temporary employment contract; the two, subjective and objective, components of insecurity are closely inter-related.

Insecurity also has important consequences on the attitudes of workers with temporary jobs. According to various studies, the objective condition of employment insecurity has many negative effects on people’s well-being and health. For example, it gives rise to a greater perception of fatigue in performing one’s duties, higher levels of job dissatisfaction (Benavides, Benach, Diez-Roux, & Roman, 2000), more severe psychological stress, and a lower level of organizational commitment (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004).

A substantial amount of research has shown, however, that temporary workers have sometimes reported lower levels of psychosomatic disorders (Sverke, Hellgreen, & Näswall, 2002), stress (Moilanen, 2000), and role conflicts (Parker, Griffin, Sprigg, & Wall, 2002) than

permanent workers. Such a situation can be explained using the concept of justice; organizations assure a “fair” treatment when benefits (related to salaries and career, training, or opportunities) are available to all workers, without discriminating between core and contingent workforce, with a view to enhancing every individual’s performance and skills. This approach helps to foster a sense of fairness among the workers, in line with the Relative Deprivation Theory (Crosby, 1976), according to which workers’ attitudes toward an organization depend on the comparison they draw between their own benefits and those received by colleagues in the same conditions (Mauno et. al., 2005). The more temporary workers feel they are being treated in the same way as the permanent staff, the more positive their attitude to their job and the organization will be.

A second key issue derives from the Anticipation Theory (Wheeler & Buckley, 2000), which states that the attitude a worker develops toward an organization is more positive the more he/she expects an open-ended contract.

On the other hand, subjective insecurity stems from how individuals assess their current employment. Very often, this type of insecurity has been defined as the perception of a threatening situation that might lead to the loss of one’s job (Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, & Pinneau, 1980). Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) gave a positive definition of the sense of security as the worker’s feeling that he/she will succeed in keeping his/her job even when it is under threat (due to redundancies or the elimination of some of its desirable features, such as chances of promotion or fringe benefits).

From the Stress Theory perspective, insecurity could be seen as a stressor: in a time of crisis, the worker perceives a discrepancy between the desired level of security and that guaranteed by the organization, and this has damaging effects on the individual’s attitudes and well-being. Sverke et al. (2002) showed a positive correlation between perceived insecurity, work dissatisfaction, and the intention to change one’s job.

### Individual Preferences and Skills

The concept of choice, in terms of a preference for temporary employment contracts, is seen as crucial in the reference literature. Marler, Barringer, and Milkovich (2002) saw temporary workers as differing in two dimensions: the skills they possess and their preferences for different types of contract. Two worker types can therefore be identified: a “traditional” worker with limited skills and a preference for a standard, open-ended employment contract, and a “boundaryless” worker with far more skills and a preference for a non-standard career. These two types differ in several respects: boundaryless workers perceive the opportunity to have numerous short or medium-term working relationships with different companies more positively than traditional workers; they expect to receive higher salaries and sometimes they actually do; are more satisfied with their work and payment; feel more committed to the organization; are more often part of a family in which both partners work and earn an income.

The authors therefore claimed that a relatively simple distinction exists between those who prefer temporary work contracts (boundaryless workers) and those who do not (traditional workers), though it has been noted that such a preference can be defined along a continuum (Marler et al., 2002).

Saunders and Thornhill (2006) extended the classification suggested by Marler et al. (2002) — which originally referred to agency-administered work — to all temporary workers. Combining the two variables, “skills” and “contract preferences,” grants four possible profiles: 1) boundaryless workers, with very high qualifications and a strong preference for temporary work; 2) regular temporary workers, with limited qualifications and a marked preference for temporary work; 3) occasional temporary workers, with high qualifications and a low preference for temporary work; 4) traditional workers, with limited qualifications and a low preference for temporary work.

### Work Insecurity and Well-Being

As noted previously, perceived job insecurity is a stress factor that can undermine an individual’s well-being; in an insecure employment, a worker experiences a discrepancy between the objectively-low job security the employer offers and the hoped-for security: this situation can have a number of negative psychological and physical consequences.

De Witte and Näswall (2003) explained the negative relationship between perceived job insecurity and well-being by two hypotheses. The Intensification Hypothesis, based on Stress Theory, states that when two or more stressful experiences occur at the same time, their combined negative effect tends to be exacerbated. It follows that the effects of stressors on well-being are less severe when they are experienced separately or at different times. According to the Intensification Hypothesis, perceived job insecurity has a more negative influence on temporary workers than on permanent staff, because the former already experience an objective situation of insecurity, given the intrinsic nature of their work, not to mention the other sources of stress typical of any job. This hypothesis can also be interpreted in the light of the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001), postulating a general tendency to minimize losses and try to preserve resources. A condition of greater individual malaise is therefore associated with greater losses.

The Violation Hypothesis derives instead from the Psychological Contract Theory, according to which the violation of a tacit agreement between workers and organizations can have many negative consequences on the workers’ well-being. In this perspective, perceived job insecurity has a more pronounced negative effect on workers who attach greater importance to objective job security, that is, those employed on open-ended contracts. The Violation Hypothesis has often been confirmed empirically, as in research conducted by De Witte and Näswall (2003), and by De Cuyper and De Witte (2003).

Levashina and Hundley (2004) also highlighted the importance of freedom of choice for individuals signing a temporary employment contract, because workers who have deliberately chosen a temporary job naturally have higher levels of well-being than those who would have preferred permanent employment.

### Job Satisfaction

Beckmann, Binz, and Schauenberg (2007) tried to systematize the evidence gathered that far on the relationship between job satisfaction and temporary work. They argued that short-term

employment contracts can have both positive and negative effects on job satisfaction. The negative effects are the most obvious and are taken for granted: temporary jobs are generally associated with a greater perception of job insecurity, which, in turn, triggers concern about losing one's job and the associated income. All this affects people's work, satisfaction, and well-being (Sverke et al., 2002).

A second explanation emerges from the Psychological Contract Theory, according to which workers seeing no chance of converting their temporary job with an organization into permanent employment despite all their efforts, will perceive this as a violation (De Witte & Näswall, 2003).

The negative relationship between short-term contracts and job satisfaction also stems from social comparisons between one's situation and that of others; workers with temporary contracts may see themselves as disadvantaged in terms of job security, experiencing feelings of inequality and deprivation (Pearce, 1998).

Beckmann et al. (2007) wondered why temporary workers may, however, experience greater job satisfaction than people in permanent jobs. The reason, in this case, lies in the very fact of having a job (given the previous unemployment condition), or in a stronger motivation to do well in the hope of being rewarded with an open-ended contract when the appointment comes to an end (Galup, Saunders, Nelson, & Cerveny, 1997; McDonald & Makin, 2000).

Most research conducted on job satisfaction in temporary workers has produced contradictory results (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). For example, a negative relationship emerged between temporary work and job satisfaction (Bergman, 2002; Kaiser, 2002), which seems to be less pronounced among women (D'Addio, Eriksson, & Frijters, 2003). In other words, female workers with temporary contracts experience higher levels of job satisfaction than their male counterparts, possibly because women react more favorably to types of contract that allow them to organize their time flexibly, adapting to the needs of managing a family and caring for elderly relatives, because these responsibilities are still usually shouldered by women.

It was noted, in particular, that temporary contracts affect specific aspects of job satisfaction, such as satisfaction with payment, perceived occupational safety, job content, and career prospects (Booth, Francesconi, & Frank, 2002).

Nowadays, however, there is a tendency to consider not so much the types of contract, but rather the individual's psychological features as determinants of job satisfaction. De Witte and Näswall (2003), and MacNamara (2003) stressed the central role of perceived security as a variable determining job satisfaction, while Levashina and Hundley (2004) emphasized the importance of freedom of choice for individuals signing a temporary job contract with those choosing this solution deliberately showing higher levels of job satisfaction than those who see it as a last resort.

### Organizational Commitment

As with the other constructs analyzed, the specialist literature presents contrasting views on organizational commitment. Some studies found temporary workers to be characterized by lower levels of commitment than permanent staff (Van Dyne & Ang, 1998), while others reported similar levels of commitment in the two types of worker (Pearce, 1993). A research con-

ducted by McDonald and Makin (2000) showed that temporary workers in the tourist sector had higher levels of affective and normative commitment than permanent workers, and that the relational component of the psychological contract of the two types of worker was much the same. These authors tried to explain the different, often inconsistent, results as follows: because a continuance commitment is an indication that a worker hopes to stay on with the organization in the future, contingent workers who would like to keep their jobs indefinitely will understandably show high levels of continuance commitment. At the same time, in line with the Anticipatory Socialization Theory, compliance with the rules, symbols, and rituals of a desirable group is often stronger in subjects who are outside it, but wish to enter and become part of it (McDonald & Makin, 2000); thus a person's psychological components (the desire to become part of a group) stand out as a reason for commitment.

In addition to the inherent complexity of the construct and its breakdown into three separate components — affective, normative, and continuance — the great variety of situations that can be considered as temporary work must be borne in mind. An example is the contracts by temporary employment agencies, in which Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow (2006) identified what they called a dual commitment. Here workers formally work for an agency, but they are really serving in a given client organization and can therefore recognize and differentiate between two levels of commitment: to the agency and to the organization.

### Altruism and Compliance

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is a term describing a worker's compliance with the needs of the organization, such as working late to complete a task, or behaving prosocially toward colleagues, for instance helping a colleague in difficulty. OCBs are not covered explicitly in employment contracts or remuneration systems. In one of the first studies on the subject, Van Dyne and Ang (1998) showed that contingent workers implement fewer OCBs than workers with permanent contracts, the former also showing a lower level of organizational commitment. This may be because companies typically give fewer rewards (be they tangible or intangible) to temporary staff, who consequently feel less "indebted" to their employers.

Feather and Rauter (2004) analyzed the relationship between OCBs, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, chances of self-satisfaction (in terms of influence on job content, variety of occupational roles, and opportunities to use their skills), and objective job security. They found that contingent teachers (in an objectively insecure employment condition) have higher levels of OCB and perceived job insecurity, and fewer chances of self-satisfaction at work than teachers on permanent contracts (in objectively more secure conditions). They also showed a positive correlation among contingent teachers between OCBs and perceived insecurity, as opposed to a negative relationship between OCBs and chances of influencing their job content or using their skills at work. They noted that contract workers, who perceive themselves as more insecure in their work, less able to influence their own activities, and less required to use their skills, perceive OCB as a way to meet needs related to security, influence, and the use of their skills at work. Conversely, teachers with a permanent contract and a secure job, greater responsibility, and more opportunities to use all their skills, use OCB to obtain other personal goals, such as promotions and better career prospects. Finally, among the temporary workers, OCBs were as-



sociated directly with both affective commitment and identification with the organization, while this is not true of permanent staff.

Chambel and Castanheira (2006) showed a fundamental role of the psychological contract as a variable mediating between a worker's status and OCBs; temporary workers adopt a compliant and altruistic behavior when their psychological contract attributes importance to social and emotional aspects in their interaction with the organization. As there is often a correlation between temporary worker status and transactional psychological contract, which focuses essentially on economic and material variables, the organization clearly has a central role in making contingent workers feel important and not discriminated: this will enable workers to implement OCBs with benefits for both sides. The authors also noted that a relational type of contract actually benefits the workers' performance as well.

### Strain

Some research on temporary work identified it as a possible cause of strain (Belous, 1989; Feldman, Doeringhaus, & Turnley, 1995), while other studies provided evidence to the contrary, noting a negative correlation between temporary work and strain (Lee & Johnson, 1991; Russell-Gardner & Jackson, 1995). Sharon, Griffin, Sprigg, and Wall (2002) suggested that the relationship between the status of contingent worker and strain is mediated by four intervening variables: job security, participatory problem-solving style, role overload, and role conflict. Temporary employment, considered in this model as an independent variable, negatively influences the above four dimensions, each of which has subsequent repercussions on strain. On the one hand, job insecurity and participatory problem-solving style result being inversely proportional to strain; on the other, role overload and role conflict directly influence the dependent variable.

### Perception of Organizational Support

Two constructs in the literature on contingent work refer to how organizations treat their employees, namely, perceived justice and perceived organizational support (POS). The literature has highlighted the importance of POS and the perception of justice in determining an employee's commitment to an organization. According to the *rule of reciprocity*, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) emphasized a strong positive relationship between POS and affective organizational commitment. Though this conclusion was drawn from analyzing several studies conducted mostly on permanently-employed workers, it is reasonable to assume that the affective commitment toward an organization is influenced by the employee's perception of how much it supports its workers (Coyle-Shapiro & Morrow, 2006).

In a study on workers with short-term contracts, Levesque and Rousseau (1999) suggested that perceived socio-emotional support correlates directly with organizational commitment. Here again, the issue becomes more complicated in the case of agency-administered work, because there are two organizations capable of offering the worker support.

Both Liden, Wayne, Kraimer, and Sparrowe (2003) and McClurg (1999) showed that commitment to the client organization depends on the support it provides, considered separately

from the commitment afforded to the agency, which also depends on the support offered by the latter. Connelly, Gallagher, and Gilley (2003) demonstrated, however, that the support provided by the client organization can predict affective and continuance commitment toward the agency, in a sort of spillover effect. Therefore, both separate and interacting dimensions of organizational commitment are present.

### Conflict and Work Overload

The topics discussed so far show that — if certain conditions are met — there may be positive aspects associated with temporary work. In addition to the conditions mentioned above, it can be noted, for example, that temporary workers perform less demanding tasks than permanent staff, in terms of both quality (skills and responsibilities) and quantity, so role overload — defined as an excessive labor demand for the worker — can be expected to be more severe for core employees at a company than for contingent workers.

Role conflict is the lack of congruence between personal expectations and the content of the role that a worker is called to fill (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Numerous studies agreed that temporary workers are less liable to experience situations of role conflict than long-term workers (Parker et al., 2002) probably, according to these authors, because of the greater simplicity of the contract between contingent workers and the organization, which leaves less room for potential interference and conflict. There is also a positive correlation between role conflict and strain, as shown by studies conducted by Beehr (1985).

Finally, the work-family conflict is worth mentioning, though this variable is not covered explicitly in the model proposed by Parker et al. (2002). It often happens that workers are committed to temporary jobs as a way to reconcile the demands of their professional and private lives. This is especially true of women, who shoulder most of the burden of care of children and/or the elderly.

Some studies testified to how temporary workers often enjoy a lesser degree of flexibility than they had expected (Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000). For example, such workers sometimes feel that they cannot refuse an assignment or adapt their working hours to avoid their conflicting with other, non-occupational, responsibilities. Such a situation could be attributed to their fear of not receiving other appointments or job opportunities in the future (Henson, 1996; Rogers, 2000).

### OBJECTIVES

Our investigation<sup>1</sup> aimed to survey the perception of organizational well-being in a population of mainly temporary workers employed in a group of hotels located in the same area. The survey aimed specifically to: 1) identify the part played by certain characteristics of the sample — for instance, gender, type of contract, degree of freedom in the choice of contract, feasibility and desirability of the temporary contract being converted into a permanent post — in influencing the perception of organizational well-being/malaise; 2) identify any areas in which to invest to prevent malaise and promote organizational well-being.



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## METHOD

### Participants<sup>2</sup>

The survey involved 106 workers, 66% of whom female, employed by a group of hotels located in the same area; 44.4% of the sample were under 30 years old, 50.9% between 30 and 55, and 4.7% over 55. While 30.2% of the workers had a permanent contract, 69.8% were in temporary employment; 70% of the sample reported having chosen their current type of contract deliberately. Regarding the position held in the organization, only 11.3% had white-collar jobs, while all other respondents fit into the “blue collar worker” category.

### Questionnaire

The tool used was a questionnaire consisting of various scales for assessing strain, burnout, mobbing, and job satisfaction, associated with indicators of organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors, attitude toward absenteeism, and turnover intention. The questionnaire, called “Test for assessment of risk correlated with working stress from the perspective of organizational well-being” (Q-Bo; De Carlo, Falco, & Capozza, 2008), also measured organizational dimensions, such as: organizational culture; organizational climate; organizational conflict; perceived collective efficacy; perceived organizational support; perceived security/comfort; cognitive load and sources of stress — aspects perceived as the main causes of psychosocial occupational risks.

The questionnaire was also designed to record background data, such as gender, age, education, occupational role, type of contract, and time in the present appointment, as well as an indication of the extent to which the worker deliberately chose this type of contract and considered it satisfactory. The questionnaire ended with some questions for fixed-term contract workers on any prior work experience, and on how likely and desirable they considered the conversion of their current contract into an open-ended one.

In particular, the study relied on the following scales.

The *organizational climate* scale consisted of 32 items divided into 16 dimensions. Eleven were taken from the Ostroff model (1993) (participation, warmth, social rewards, cooperation, communication, growth, innovation, autonomy, hierarchy, structure, extrinsic rewards, orientation to success); with “cooperation” being split into two separate dimensions (cooperation with superiors and cooperation with colleagues), and three new dimensions were added (resentment, gossip, and technology). The answers were provided on a 6-point Likert scale, from *mostly disagree* to *mostly agree* (sample items: “a cold and hostile environment prevails,” “there is room for innovations and changes,” “nothing can be done without the prior consent of superiors”).

The *organizational conflict* scale comprised 23 items divided into two dimensions: conflict in organizations (with four sub-dimensions: conflict with bosses, conflict with colleagues, intergroup conflict, and emotional conflict) and role conflict (person-role, intra-role, work-family, and ethical conflict). The answers were provided on a 6-point Likert scale, from *mostly disagree* to *mostly agree* (sample items: “I do not devote enough time to my family because of my work,” “my boss gets me into trouble because he/she assigns unclear tasks to me,” “my job goes against my ethical/moral values”).

The *job satisfaction* scale comprised 15 items, articulated into five dimensions: satisfaction with job content, satisfaction with payment, satisfaction with interpersonal relations, satisfaction with organizational processes, and satisfaction with professional growth. The answers were provided on a 6-point Likert scale, from *mostly disagree* to *mostly agree* (sample item: “indicate the degree of satisfaction in relation to opportunities for training and learning, to responsibilities that your job requires you to take, to interpersonal relationships with your colleagues”).

The *organizational commitment* scale consisted of six items, two for each of the three components (affective, normative, and continuance commitment) considered in the Meyer and Allen’s model (1991; for the scale used in the Italian context, see Falvo, Hichy, Capozza, & De Carlo, 2002). The *organizational citizenship behavior* (OCB) scale included four items, two for altruism and two for compliance. The answers were provided on a 6-point Likert scale, from *mostly disagree* to *mostly agree* (sample of commitment items: “this organization is very important for my life,” “I have a feeling of thanksgiving/gratitude to this organization”; sample of compliance and altruism items: “I generally work more than I am requested,” “I spontaneously help my colleagues when they are in trouble”).

The *strain* scale had 12 items measuring three dimensions: emotional instability, work disengagement, and leisure. Together with the strain scale, some items were also presented as indicators of the three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and professional inefficacy (Borgogni, Galati, & Petitta, 2005; Maslach & Leiter, 1997). The answers were provided on a 6-point Likert scale, from *mostly disagree* to *mostly agree* (sample of strain items: “at work, it is difficult for me to focus,” “at work, I feel more anxious than usual”; sample of burnout items: “I am inept at my work,” “my work has no importance to me”).

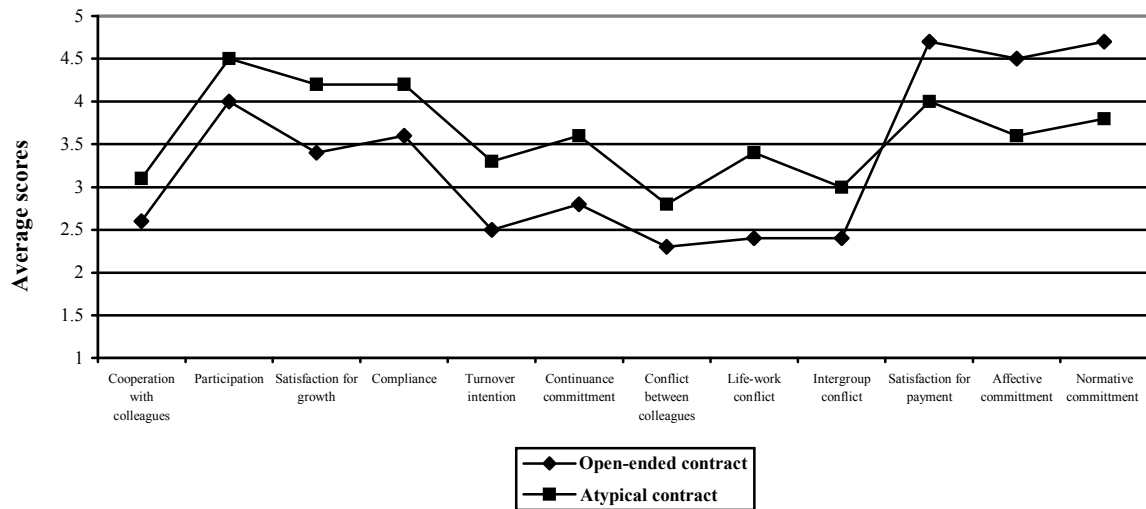
Finally, a measure of *job-changing intentions* was used to assess the turnover phenomenon (Hom, Karanikas-Walker, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992).

## Results

Data analysis was preceded by a preliminary assessment of reliability of the scales used. Specifically, scale reliability was between  $\alpha = .69$  and  $\alpha = .80$ .

Figure 1 shows the significant<sup>3</sup> differences in the organizational well-being dimensions in relation to the “type of contract” (open-ended vs. temporary). The temporary workers scored higher for cooperation with colleagues and satisfaction with professional growth, and their score in compliance seems to suggest they are more “grateful” to the organization. These initial findings seem somewhat inconsistent with the idea of temporary workers suffering from a sense of marginality (also psychological) in the organization.

Temporary staff also reported higher levels of continuance commitment and lower levels of affective and normative commitment than permanent staff, the opposite situation from that presented by McDonald and Makin (2000). The employees they interviewed (who also worked in the tourist sector) reported a stronger affective and normative commitment and a weaker continuance commitment than the permanent staff, leading the authors to assume that the temporary workers’ psychological contract was more oriented toward the relational pole than that of open-ended workers. A more transactional psychological contract emerged in our sample: it is in the



Note. Each deviation showed in the figure is significant to the t-test,  $p < .05$ .

FIGURE 1  
Comparison between workers with open-ended versus atypical contracts.

temporary workers' interest to give the impression that they would like to be part of the organization.

When it comes to OCBs, compliance was higher among the temporary workers, which seems to support the above considerations: these workers behaved as if they belonged in the organization and were prepared to do more than was strictly required of them in order to "do their bit" for the company. These results are consistent with the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), stating that people choose to adopt a behavior, after a cost-benefit analysis of their opportunities over a certain period of time.

As for the perception of conflict, our temporary workers reported perceiving higher levels of conflict with colleagues, with the group, and between work and life (Figure 1). The last dimension, especially, is in line with the literature, although such friction could be exacerbated by the type of job involved (our sample worked intensively, often outside normal working hours and at particular times of the year, all factors that can make an optimal work-life integration more difficult). Finally, the intention to change jobs was stronger in employees with atypical contracts.

The degree of freedom of choice of employment contract is an extremely important factor too (Figure 2), with far-reaching effects on a variety of organizational well-being dimensions. Workers who did not really want a temporary contract generally had a worse perception of organizational climate, scoring lower for cooperation with superiors, participation, autonomy, innovation, and showed a trend toward lower scores for growth and extrinsic rewards.

Regarding job satisfaction, freedom of choice influenced the dimensions of satisfaction with job content, professional growth, payment, and organizational processes; in all such cases, temporary workers who would have preferred a permanent contract scored lower.

Finally, temporary staff always showed higher levels of emotional instability and tended to have higher scores for person-role conflict and intention to change jobs.

Correlation coefficients revealed some interesting relations between certain organiza-

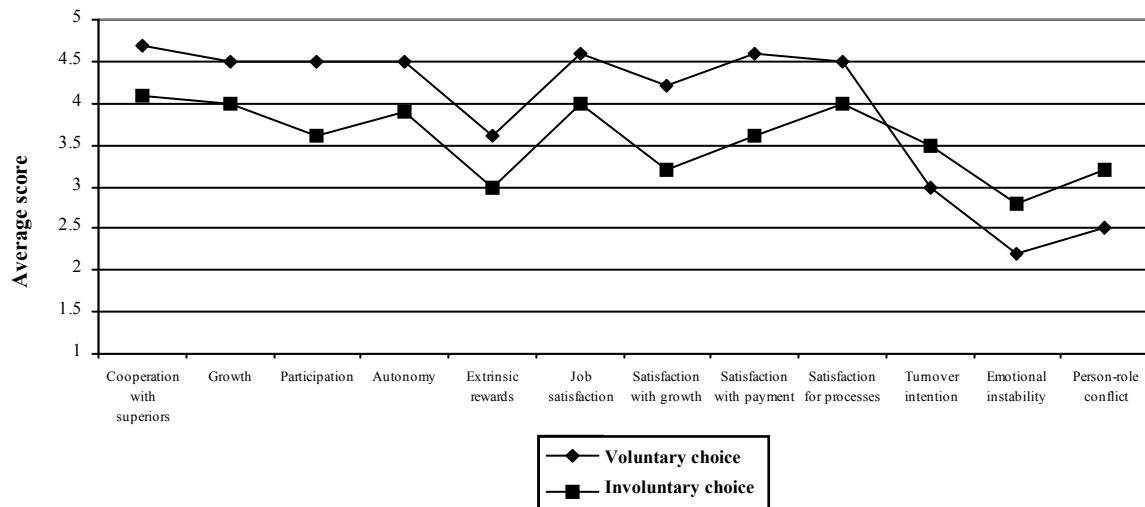


FIGURE 2  
Comparison between temporary workers who did versus did not deliberately choose a temporary contract.

tional well-being/malaise dimensions on the one hand, and the chances of a temporary contract being converted into an open-ended one, together with the desirability of such a conversion, on the other.

A positive correlation emerged for some variables analyzed: in particular, higher levels of satisfaction with job content ( $r = .38, p < .01$ ), satisfaction with professional growth ( $r = .37, p < .01$ ), and perception of collective efficacy ( $r = .24, p < .05$ ) were associated with a greater likelihood of acquiring a permanent contract. Even the worker's desire for this to happen seemed to have an effect: the stronger the desire, the lower the satisfaction with the job content ( $r = -.34, p < .01$ ), interpersonal relations ( $r = -.22, p < .05$ ), and professional growth ( $r = -.35, p < .01$ ), the perception of organizational support ( $r = -.21, p < .05$ ), and altruism toward the organization ( $r = -.22, p < .05$ ), with a corresponding increase in cynicism ( $r = .23, p < .05$ ) and emotional exhaustion ( $r = .23, p < .05$ ).

The role played by gender is interesting. As regards organizational climate, women scored higher than men for cooperation with superiors, social rewards, extrinsic rewards, as well as affective and normative commitment. Men claimed to be more compliant toward their organization, to think more often of resigning from their job, to experience more emotional instability, emotional exhaustion, and disaffection with their work, and to face more conflict with their colleagues or within work groups. A fairly consistent picture thus emerged, in which male workers generally experienced more severe organizational malaise than females, in line with the situation highlighted by D'Addio et al. (2003).

Finally, with a view to identifying potential areas in which to work to improve workers' organizational well-being, we investigated the relationship between the dimensions considered as antecedents and those considered as consequences of organizational well-being/malaise.

In particular, the assessment of overall satisfaction with organizational life was used as the dependent variable in a multiple regression model, considering the mean scores obtained in the dimensions of organizational climate, organizational conflict, and perceived organizational

support as predictor variables. The stepwise procedure used gave rise to a model identifying the following predictors: “cooperation with superiors” ( $\beta = .76$ ), which explained 58% of variance at the first step; “gossip” ( $\beta = -.33$ ), which explained 9.7% at the second step, and “person-role conflict” ( $\beta = -.25$ ), with an additional 5% of variance explained for the dependent variable “satisfaction.” Together, these variables explained 72.7% of the variance in overall satisfaction.

Cooperation with superiors therefore had a positive influence on overall satisfaction, while gossip and person-role conflict impacted negatively on the dependent variable, so lower scores in these areas would improve satisfaction.

As for worker turnover intention, the first variable to enter the equation was “cooperation with superiors,” which explained 23.3% of the variance in workers’ intention to change their jobs ( $\beta = -.48$ ), while “work-life conflict” ( $\beta = .29$ ) explained 8.4% of the variance at the second step, together accounting for 31.7% of the variance.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to analyze the perception of organizational well-being in a sample of mainly temporary workers in the tourist trade. The results help to highlight certain aspects of the relationship between temporary employment and organizational well-being, and hint at possible recommendations for the management of organizations where contingent employment is an important issue.

The overall picture that emerged in our sample differs somewhat from the initial studies by Van Dyne and Ang (1998) and Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni (1995), who judged temporary employment to be a kind of “poor relation” of permanent employment, characterized by lower levels of satisfaction and commitment, and more arid psychological contracts.

Our data suggest a global complexity in the organizational well-being/malaise profile of temporary workers, who seemed to feel more a part of the organization and to have a more positive impression of their cooperation with colleagues than permanent staff members; they also reported being more satisfied with their professional growth and scored higher for compliance, possibly suggesting a stronger sense of “gratitude” to the organization among temporary employees.

Temporary staff also reported a stronger continuance commitment but lower levels of affective and normative commitment than permanent employees — quite the opposite situation to that presented by McDonald and Makin (2000), who saw the psychological contract of their temporary workers as more oriented toward the relational pole. In our sample, instead, these workers’ psychological contract seems to be more transactional than the permanent staff’s. Our temporary employees were willing to act as if they were part of the organization because they felt it was in their interest to do so.

In the light of these apparently contradictory results, a study by Chambel and Castanheira (2006) is worth remembering, where the authors noted that temporary workers develop psychological contracts that place more emphasis on economic and transactional components than on socio-emotional ones when they see the organization they work for as offering them little chance of their temporary contract being turned into a permanent post. On the other hand, where there is

a chance of permanent employment, temporary workers develop forms of psychological contract more similar to those of long-term staff, that is, more focused on socio-emotional aspects.

Our descriptive analyses seem to confirm this hypothesis: 80% of participants were disillusioned, believing they had little or no chance of being offered a permanent job (55% of them considered this possibility desirable). As a whole, and subject to further studies, our findings may offer an explanation for the previous considerations on commitment; as Chambel and Castanheira (2006) claimed, awareness that there is no chance of obtaining a permanent contract can affect commitment, determining a shift toward the transactional pole.

Notable is also the positive correlation between the hope of being taken on permanently, and the satisfaction with job content and professional growth, and the sense of collective efficacy. How much a worker hopes to see his/her temporary job converted into an open-ended employment contract proves to be a very important variable, correlating negatively with emotional exhaustion, cynicism, satisfaction (with work, interpersonal relations, and professional growth), perceived organizational support, efficacy, and collective compliance.

As for the importance of a person's freedom of choice of a given type of contract, Levashina and Hundley (2004) showed that temporary workers who had deliberately chosen temporary jobs experienced a greater well-being than those who would have preferred permanent employment, and our sample confirmed that this is a fundamental factor affecting a variety of organizational well-being/malaise dimensions. Temporary workers who would have preferred a permanent job generally scored lower in some of the dimensions regarding organizational climate (e.g., cooperation with superiors, participation, autonomy, structure, innovation, growth, and extrinsic rewards) and job satisfaction (satisfaction with job content, professional growth, payment, and organizational processes), while they scored higher for some indicators of organizational malaise, such as emotional instability, person-role conflict, and intention to resign.

Resulting indications for management are varied and interesting. Some temporary workers clearly have difficulty in satisfactorily reconciling work with private life: over 60% of these people are unmarried and/or have no children. This greater difficulty affects males more than females and gives rise to a state of malaise.

We also identified the substrate of some organizational well-being/malaise dimensions, particularly job satisfaction and turnover intention. Our analyses highlighted the important part played by cooperation with superiors, person-role conflict, and life-work conflict in any malaise and in the quality of life within the organization considered.

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#### NOTES

1. This study was also presented at the IAREP-SABE Conference — September 2008, Rome, Italy.
2. The survey was conducted on all the hotels in an Italian province.
3. In this paragraph we only report and comment on significant differences in participants' responses vis-à-vis the variables considered; ANOVA and t-test were applied.



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