
Management of temporary agency workers and impact on their well-being

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Abstract

In work relations, there is a growing use of temporary agency work (TAW) agreement, reducing sometimes long-term work relationships with non-standard arrangements. Even more so in recent years, as a consequence of the economic crisis that led to high levels of unemployment in various European countries. The Covid-19 pandemic also contributed to the diffusion of TAW employment and together with the post crisis period, it increased social inequalities, and a sense of precariousness.

These non-standard arrangements are becoming the new normal, affecting the workers' lives. This study aims to explore the benefits and drawbacks of temporary agency work from the viewpoint of the workers involved, contributing to a better understanding of the effects on temporary agency workers and helping both workers and employers involved to improve the management of temporary agency workers.

For this study a qualitative approach was adopted, with data collected from in-depth semi-structured interviews that are able to provide relevant insights on the workers' experiences, and the perceived impact on their well-being. Ten people were interviewed, all belonging to the 20-to-40 age range and currently living and working in Portugal, despite their nationalities. Through the conducted interviews, it has been found that some main factors can affect and impact the overall well-being of these workers. The study identified issues related to the lack of communication, feeling of missing support, willingness to churn and the lack of retention plans, job instability and perceived inequalities, commitment and motivation at work, general health, and safety conditions.

Key words: triangular relationship, well-being, temporary agency workers, short-term relationship, job insecurity, temporary work agencies

Resumo

Nas relações de trabalho, há uma utilização crescente de acordos de trabalho temporário de agência, substituindo as relações de trabalho de longo prazo por relações de emprego atípicas. Ainda mais nos últimos anos, como consequência da crise económica que gerou elevados níveis de desemprego em vários países europeus. A pandemia de Covid-19 também contribuiu para a difusão do trabalho temporário de agência e, juntamente com o período pós-crise, aumentou as desigualdades sociais e um sentimento de precariedade.

As relações atípicas de trabalho subordinado estão a tornar-se o novo normal, afetando a vida dos trabalhadores. Este estudo pretende explorar as vantagens e desvantagens do trabalho temporário de agência, o ponto de vista dos trabalhadores envolvidos, contribuindo para uma melhor compreensão dos efeitos produzidos sobre os trabalhadores temporários e ajudando os empregados e os empregadores envolvidos a melhorar a gestão dos trabalhadores temporários.

O estudo adotou uma abordagem qualitativa com dados recolhidos em entrevistas semi-estruturadas que permitiram recolher informações relevantes sobre as perspectivas dos trabalhadores e o impacto percebido pelos trabalhadores no seu bem-estar. Foram entrevistadas dez pessoas, todas pertencentes à faixa etária dos 20 aos 40 anos e que atualmente vivem e trabalham em Portugal, independentemente da sua nacionalidade. Através das entrevistas realizadas, foram identificados os principais fatores principais que podem afectar e impactar o bem-estar geral destes trabalhadores, destacando-se os aspectos relacionados com a falta de comunicação, sentimento de falta de apoio, instabilidade de trabalho, a ausência de um plano de retenção adotado, instabilidade no emprego e desigualdades percebidas, comprometimento e motivação no trabalho, condições gerais de saúde e segurança.

Palavras-chave: relação triangular, bem-estar, trabalhadores temporários, relacionamento de curto prazo, insegurança no emprego, agências de trabalho temporário

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1 INTRODUCTION

Many organisations in recent years have adopted temporary agency work, by reducing most common long-term work relationships with non-standard arrangements (Thomson & Hünefeld, 2021). An agency worker is a person who has a contract with an agency to work for a client company. This worker may have either a contract for service or a contract of employment with the agency for a predefined period of time. This kind of work is usually called ‘temporary work’, ‘temping’ or ‘agency work’ (Nidirect, 2021).

According to the World Employment Confederation (WEC, 2020) in 2018, there were about 57 million temporary agency workers worldwide, a growth of 8% over 2017. In Europe, there were about ten million agency workers (WEC, 2020). Moreover, WEC (2020) found that in 2018, Italy had approximately 800,000 agency workers, Portugal had 879,000 and Spain 757,000, so Portugal showed a higher level of employees hired under this work relationship. And this work arrangement seems to be increasing in the EU. We can also perceive that it has developed in several ways in various national economies (Thomson & Hünefeld, 2021). The number of TAWs employed in Ireland, for instance, almost tripled, while instead, in Germany it almost doubled (Thomson & Hünefeld, 2021). This result has been attributed to the economic crisis that led to high levels of unemployment in most countries, including Portugal, Spain, Greece and Italy, and reduced the opportunities to get “standard” employment arrangements (Chambel & Sobral, 2018). Therefore, the pandemic, and the post crisis period not only increased social inequalities, but they also contributed to the diffusion of TAW employment, and precariousness (Thomson & Hünefeld, 2021).

The focus of this research will be on the Portuguese temporary employment industry, which has also evolved and changed in recent years. Portugal is nowadays one of the largest European markets for agency work (WEC, 2020). Like other countries, Portuguese agencies can employ workers on a temporary or permanent type of contract.

The purpose of this study is to explore this emerging trend and respective consequences, and to understand from the workers’ viewpoint how to handle this triangular relationship, in order to improve agency workers’ well-being. This research is intended to explore the issues that might have an impact on temporary workers’ well-being, for instance related to non-involvement, sense of work instability and willingness to churn.

Therefore, the aim of the study is to focus on temporary agency workers and well-being, especially on its three dimensions, the psychological well-being, the social well-being, and the physical well-being, and the analysis of critical aspects that can have an impact on the overall well-being. Through the conducted in-depth interviews, it was possible to get more details regarding workers' feelings, and how the workers' overall well-being is impacted on a work daily basis. The acknowledgment of this impact can be essential for both involved managers to improve the management of these workers. Therefore, the main contribution of this study is to look at these workers' conditions so as to identify measures that can be adopted to mitigate the detrimental effects of this work arrangement (Thomson & Hünefeld, 2021). This research also contributes to the literature through a better understanding of the practices that should be applied by both companies involved in this triangular work relationship, by recommending the application of the sustainable Human Resource Management, which is presented in a later stage.

Overall, research on articles pertinent to the theme was done to support and develop the research idea. An introductory chapter about well-being and its three dimensions discusses this broad topic, which helps understand how it can be impacted. This work did not present either a specific entire chapter about standard work agreements and non-standard ones, or the difference between these since the main takeaways are explained naturally throughout the research work. It was just essential, afterwards, to indicate concisely how the temporary agency work works and in which sense it has become the new normal, by underlining the main benefits and drawbacks for workers in this triangular work environment. An idea about the actual management applied by managers of both companies comes from the information that emerged from these analysed interviews. To cope with this issue, some actions found to be beneficial when leading temporary agency workers are presented together with actions taken by the sustainable human resource system.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Well-being

2.1.1 Well-being at work

There is a reason why employers should pay attention and take into consideration the employees' well-being and this concern is explained by the mutual gain's perspective (Van De Voorde et al., 2011). This concept will also help understand why the focus on well-being is relevant to the Human Resource Management (HRM). An author argues that "The apparent novelty of HRM lies in the claim that by making full use of its human resources, a firm will gain competitive advantage" (Guest, 1990, p.378). Guest (1990) indeed suggested that companies should consider their human resources as an asset relevant to gain competitive advantage. Therefore, if the well-being of workers is taken into account, the workers will feel satisfied and better, and in turn this will have an impact on the overall performance. So, the mutual gain concept argues that the human resources practices applied in management can affect both the employees' well-being and the performance of a business, and consequently, organisations can benefit from these practices (Guest, 1990). Once the employees' well-being is guaranteed and protected, it will have a positive impact on the performance and outcomes, allowing companies to be one step ahead of each other (Guest, 1990).

In the research done by Peccei and Van De Voorde (2019) workers' well-being is best reflected in a state of psychological well-being, or "happiness", and measured by constructs such as job satisfaction and affective commitment, and health-related well-being assessed by the level of job stress, burnout, and anxiety.

Overall, there is no standard definition of well-being, but according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, n.d.), it can be explained as a collection of positive outcomes and emotions which let people feel good and satisfied with their lives (CDC, n.d.). What is relevant to well-being is the good condition of living, encountering employment, housing for instance. Usually, well-being is associated with numerous factors:

- Self-perceived health,
- Longevity,
- Healthy behaviours,

- Mental and physical illness,
- Social connectedness,
- Productivity,
- Factors in the physical and social environment.

(CDC, n.d.)

For instance, a higher well-being can result in an increase of productivity and become a job-related benefit. Therefore, it can be assumed that well-being is highly affected by the surrounding environment including health, job, family, etc... Well-being encompasses multiples aspects such as physical well-being, economic well-being, social well-being, development and activity, emotional well-being, psychological well-being, life satisfaction, domain specific satisfaction, and engaging activities and work (CDC, n.d.).

This research aims to contribute to a better understanding of three dimensions of well-being, physical, psychological, and social, so as to realise how impactful they can be for temporary workers' routine in their jobs. Well-being at work is indeed necessary and should safeguard all aspects related to the working life, including for instance physical environment, feelings about their work environment, safety measures and structure of the organisation.

Many organisations should focus more on making sure that the workers are feeling secure, committed, satisfied and healthy at their workplace. This is because, it has been found that well-being at work has a positive impact on performance and, therefore, becomes a crucial factor for the competitive advantage of the company (International Labour Organization, n.d.). The ones that are already concerned on this topic probably have realised that their workers are the most important resources but also people with shared necessities. On the other hand, practices that have a detrimental effect on well-being at the workplace could cause problems such as stress, conflicts, and mental health disorders (International Labour Organization, n.d.).

2.1.2 The three dimensions of well-being and their impacts at the workplace

In order to help companies better manage temporary agency workers and be able to promote their well-being, it is necessary to clarify the concept of well-being, in all its three dimensions.

The psychological well-being refers to individuals' subjective experience at work in terms of what and how it is done, and with whom, translated into general happiness at work, while the physical well-being results from the relationship between work and health and translated into subjective health indicators such as a sense of energy, exhaustion, job-related anxiety, stress, burnout, sleep quality, blood pressure (Guest, 2017). Social well-being instead is associated with the quality of interpersonal interactions, including relationships at the workplace, which reflect in behaviours such as cooperation, perceived social support, participation, social exchange, and trust (Guest, 2017).

According to Koo et al. (2016), social well-being is mainly composed of personal, relational, and societal dimensions. In addition, social well-being can be influenced by the harmony between individual resources and their life happenings. According to Koo et al. (2016), the social well-being of an individual increases when one feels high social inclusion, cohesion, communicational participation, and social-economic security. On the contrary, social well-being decreases when one lives discrimination experiences and trust levels are compromised.

As stated by Kour et al. (2019), the individual's positive traits, considered as optimism, well-being and personal strength can have an influence on employees' performance, hence organisational productivity. Moreover, they found that the reinforcement of organisational policies at the workplace, based on these positive traits can have a beneficial impact on performance and productivity by improving them (Kour et al., 2019).

As reported by Nadinloyi et al. (2013), work environment factors are crucial and need to be safeguard. People who suffered from psychological torment were found to experience a lower job satisfaction. In agreement with Nadinloyi et al. (2013), a low job satisfaction can negatively affect some job-related behaviours, as for instance the willingness to churn and absenteeism, burnout, self-esteem, depression, and anxiety. Therefore, job satisfaction is an important factor related to workers' health and which to focus on.

2.3 Temporary agency work and well-being at work

2.3.1 Definition of temporary agency work

Agency workers work through an employment agency which has a business-to-business relationship with a client company. This non-standard agreement involves a firm (client company) that pays a fee to the employment agency, and the agency directly hires the workers and pays them wages (Nidirect, 2021).

According to the EU Directive on Temporary Agency Work agency workers have the right to equal treatment in basic working and employment conditions since their first day at work, although they do not share the same working rights as regular employees (Citizens Information, n.d.). The basic working conditions include working time, pay, and access to facilities (Citizens Information, n.d.). The working time includes the effective working time, and all not-working time as breaks, public days, rest period, annual leave, while the pay refers to the basic payment and overtime for instance (Citizens Information, n.d.). The workers should also have access to all the facilities present at the workplace such as canteen, break rooms, and parking areas (Citizens Information, n.d.). At the same time, it is fundamental that the workers are being told about each permanent employment opportunity or growing chances (Citizens Information, n.d.).

One must express that a worker hired under permanent agency contract and assignments will not be entitled to equal treatment on pay (Citizens Information, n.d.). Each worker could receive different payslips which may include sick pays, bonuses, maternity pay, benefits (Citizens Information, n.d.).

2.3.2 The adaptation to this new normal

Given the changes that are taking place in employment relations (Guest, 2017), there is a growing interest in the literature on the three dimensions of temporary agency workers' well-being and how these can be impacted by some triggering factors. Such an understanding might contribute to the managers' recognition of the need to adopt new practices and take actions helping to mitigate detrimental effects on well-being. According to Thomson and Hünefeld (2021), nowadays organisations need to be flexible and adaptable and focus on their core business while cutting fixed costs as much as possible.

For companies, it is beneficial to hire agency workers under flexible work arrangements in order to better adjust to external demand or have high skilled workers for a shorter period of time. Rajthilak et al. (2021) agree that the implementation of temporary agency workers in one company's workforce facilitates decrease associated costs and increase flexibility, therefore the demand for these types of workers is rising among organisations.

However, managers and leaders need to be aware that using temporary agency employment to achieve this flexibility might have a negative impact on well-being and hidden costs related to individuals' health (Thomson & Hünefeld, 2021). For Guest (2017) the continued pressure at work and society are causing a menace to the overall workers' well-being. Indeed, the consideration of today's company is more about performance by putting on a secondary position the concern about workers (Guest, 2017). Therefore, he agrees that the managers should take seriously into account workers' concerns and well-being by developing practices that can positively impact them, and in turn positively affect the overall company's performance (Guest, 2017). So, the entire human resource management (HRM) system needs to be revised with the employment of practices that can strengthen workers' well-being and the relationship between workers and employers (Guest, 2017).

However, in regard to the agency workers, other parties should also care about their conditions. Managers play mostly the role of managing temporary agency workers (TAW), so they are part of this triangular work relationship. Anyway, these workers are directly hired by a temporary work agency (TWA), and therefore, the agency should also take into consideration factors impacting their overall well-being. So as to tackle this problem, a good practice suggested in the work of Thomson and Hünefeld (2021), regarding health, is to provide these workers with health care plans and several options that are attractive to them.

Other initiatives can be adopted that contribute to improve TAW employability, and fair treatment between permanent workers and TAW at the current work environment (Thomson & Hünefeld, 2021). Thomson and Hünefeld (2021) looked at the relationship between TAW' well-being as opposed to permanent workers and taking Job Insecurity (JI) or the fear of the workers of losing their job and income source, as mediators. It has been assumed indeed that temporary agency work is one of the most insecure contractual types in Europe, even TAWs who have permanent contracts with a temporary agency perceive more job insecurity than the user organisation's employees (Thomson & Hünefeld, 2021).

For Rajthilak et al. (2021) all this flexibility granted for businesses is to the detriment of workers and their augmented perception of job insecurity. Rajthilak et al. (2021) argue that temporary agency workers try to face job insecurity by reinforcing employability, and therefore, making effort in achieving great results in terms of performance and skills improvement. All these efforts are useful to better perform and overcome job insecurity, and when employability is enhanced, also both client and staffing agencies can benefit from it (Rajthilak et al., 2021). As indicated by Rajthilak et al. (2021), to be able to increase their employability, these workers seek for support in the sense of development and learning opportunities, which need to be offered by both the client and the staffing agency.

After all, according to Thomson and Hünefeld (2021) research, temporary agency work has been found to have potentially negative impacts on work attitudes, well-being, and health in many EU national economies.

The authors conclude that temporary agency work leads to higher levels of stress, and it “is detrimental in terms of job satisfaction, well-being, and health, particularly mental health” (Thomson & Hünefeld, 2021, p.3). Consequently, another factor that can have an impact on TAWs’ well-being is the perception that they may have unequal treatment as opposed to workers in standard arrangements.

The review of this paper is beneficial since it helps understand the concept of physical well-being, the second previously indicated dimension of well-being.

In addition, Cicellin et al. (2022) argue in their research that well-being is a current concern in the management of agency workers in general, and regardless of the fact that workers are hired permanently or temporarily. This non-standard arrangement is creating significant challenges for the regulatory framework of labour markets involving temporary work agencies (TWAs) and client organisations employing agency workers.

Therefore, good human resource practices (HRPs) need to be applied to match contingent workers’ needs. That is why “integrating contingent workers presents a challenge for HR management. It is important to understand how companies can effectively integrate these workers into their workforce” (Sobral et al., 2019a, p.3).

Another study also intends to recommend concrete actions to be taken by these two parties to better manage agency workers, given the need to support the development of agency

workers through distinct practices for human resource management (HRM), and to improve the employment conditions of these workers, in both public and private organisations (Cicellin et al., 2022). Moreover, it is important to provide policy actions for both TWAs and client organisations in developing agency workers' well-being and performance (Cicellin et al., 2022).

Since it is believed that both companies are jointly responsible, it is essential to come up with a Human Resource Practices (HRP) system that can be applied to the management of these workers both by the agency and the client organisation (Sobral et al., 2019a). Sobral, et al. (2019a) found four main central practices that are usually considered as a starting point for HR managers. These practices are: “the recruitment process (i.e., the fit between employees and their work environment), socialisation (i.e., identifying with the organisation's context), training and development (employability inside and outside the current company) opportunities (i.e., skill empowerment), and performance appraisal (i.e., a clear and fair evaluation method)” (Sobral et al., 2019a, p.5).

Sobral, et al. (2019a) also intend to demonstrate how challenging it is to make TAWs feel they belong to this triangular employment relationship since this involves more than one organisation. Their study has clarified that TAWs work alongside those who are directly hired by a client company. This led to some consequences impacting agency workers' well-being and both parties should realise that these workers are considered part of many organisations' labours sourcing mix and taking into account their work attitudes and performance (Sobral et al., 2019a). Therefore, these workers represent equally critical factors for a company's success. A few studies have indeed recommended that human resource practices should “invest in contingent workers. Although these workers are formally temporary, they become part of the company in which they work, as they work together with other employees and pursue the company's goals. TAWs work in client's facilities, and therefore, represent the agencies” (Sobral et al., 2019a, p.17). The authors argue that “TAW's behaviours and attitudes are crucial for agencies and client companies' strategies. Consequently, companies should treat them fairly and invest Human Resource Practices (HRP) in them” (Sobral et al., 2019a, p.17).

As it has already been presented, it is increasingly common to find temporary workers side-by-side with those who are directly employed. Then, it is important for companies to understand how to engage these workers jointly (Sobral et al., 2019a). This study

contributes to a better understanding of social well-being associated with work relationships and its implications on agency workers. Another point that emerged in the research of Sobral et al. (2019b) and may be interesting is the different perception that people have of contingent work. For some, usually the younger workers, it may represent their first job opportunity, while for others, older ones, it may represent a re-entry into the labour market. Although agency contracts are found to be a useful tool for both entry into the labour market, and to sustain the outplacement of older workers (Cicellin et al., 2022), other possible factors can have an impact on the overall agency workers' well-being. As pointed out above, the determination of these factors is relevant to contribute to the development of these workers' management through good HRPs. Therefore, a good employment of these workers can be beneficial both for companies and agency workers, since the latter may also have different development goals and be differently motivated to grow (Sobral et al., 2019b).

Sobral et al. (2021) also confirmed that motivation for temporary agency workers could be shaped in different forms at the same time, and therefore, these workers can act in different ways at the workplace. This concept comes from "the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). It accounts for several types of motivation and connections between each motivation type and human learning, performance, and well-being" (Sobral et al., 2021, p.1). "According to SDT it is possible to consider: (a) intrinsic motivation, which means doing something for its own sake, and reflects the individual's disposition to be challenged, to explore, and to develop social or cognitive competences; (b) extrinsic motivation, which is experienced in situations in which the individual acts more in accordance with the external regulation" (Sobral et al., 2021, p.1). The authors affirm that "It is therefore important to understand whether 'TAWs' commitments are related to their motivation to be in their current job situation, and consequently, to their overall employment relationship" (Sobral et al., 2021, p.2). Indeed, in the work of Menatta et al. (2021) commitment is described as a psychological attitude connected with the feelings and thoughts that workers have in regard with their relationship with the organisation itself. Consequently, the HRPs "that companies implement may play a crucial role in responding to 'TAWs' specific needs, which may influence attitudes capable of increasing workers' motivation toward their employment situation" (Sobral et al., 2021, p.2).

Therefore, managers from HR and client organisations should realise these factors and understand how they affect the way workers perceive human resource practices in their employment relationships (Sobral et al., 2019b). Motivation is important to understand how involved these workers are, and what they feel when doing their work, so in their paper '*Dealing with temporariness*', Sobral et al. (2019b) contribute to clarify psychological well-being and what can impact this dimension.

Moreover, the presence of multiple differentiated agency workers within the workplace entails different and often conflicting demands for management (Sobral et al., 2019b). Older generations are said to “have stronger work ethic and job involvement than younger generations, while the younger generations are less loyal and committed to their employers than older generations” (Sobral et al., 2019b, p.5). When hiring and managing agency workers, agencies and client companies should consider the way each generation relates to their jobs, to better respond to the worker’s needs and expectations, and in order to establish a tailored HRP system that will have a great impact on performance and well-being.

Therefore, both parties should also take into consideration these differences, both when hiring and managing agency workers, due to their peculiarity and different needs. In other terms, considering each temporary agency worker as a resourceful and unique person with needs, which may affect their job satisfaction, and psychological well-being in general.

In addition, Sobral et al. (2021) explained that when companies are able to send certain messages, which may take the form of a human resource practices system, they can create connections with workers, emphasising their importance and persuading them to respond in the same way.

This effort from both companies’ managers leads to the establishment of affective commitment (AC), which is represented by the emotional liaison and identification of workers with the organisations’ values and goals. Affective commitment is identified as one of the most relevant variables related to favourable behavioural outcomes in workers (Sobral et al., 2021). In fact, when companies want to achieve a competitive advantage, they must invest on a critical outcome like worker’s AC (Sobral et al., 2019a). As a consequence, it is a concern for managers to apply a valuable HRP system which guarantees that the

well-being of agency workers is not impacted, otherwise these workers could suffer from a lack of commitment, involvement and feel the desire to churn, among other issues. In their study, Cicellin et al. (2022) defined that employees provide stronger affective commitment to their organisations when they perceive that they receive more support. Perceived organisational support is a social factor and depends on employees' perceptions of how the organisation values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Cicellin et al., 2022). Therefore, for managers it is also relevant to understand how the lack of affective commitment and support may have an impact on agency workers' well-being, specifically social well-being and psychological well-being.

It is highlighted in the work of Cicellin et al. (2022) that both TWAs and client organisations need to develop policies to increase agency workers' support, in order to contribute to their satisfaction in terms of psychological needs for commitment, autonomy, and competence. In fact, agency workers who feel supported by both the agency and the client organisation will, therefore, reciprocate by showing effective commitment to each organisation (Cicellin et al., 2022).

It is believed by Sobral et al. (2019a) that by creating shared and complementary strategies for managing TAWs, both the agency and the client company can contribute to the success of the other. "Altogether, the development of a positive perception over a joined HRP system, will lead to a positive reinforcement of TAWs outcomes towards both companies" (Sobral et al., 2019a, p.7), overall, their perceived performance and well-being.

Thomson and Hünefeld (2021) aimed to present some evidence that temporary work might affect health via job insecurity (JI) since there are hardly any studies focussing on the effects and mechanisms of temporary agency work (TAW). The authors underlined the potentially detrimental effects of temporary employment on physical well-being and found that TAW was related to unfavourable outcomes in terms of job satisfaction, general health status and musculoskeletal complaints (Thomson & Hünefeld, 2021). Moreover, JI partially mediated all three underlying associations (Thomson & Hünefeld, 2021).

The paper of Cicellin et al. (2022) also contributes to the literature on agency workers and suggests useful managerial and policymakers' interventions for both temporary work agencies and client organisations for the development of the temporary agency work

environment and well-being of workers. Cicellin et al. 's (2022) study the objective to analyse the effects of the type of agency contract on the relationship between agency workers' organisational commitment and perceived organisational support as a final impact on agency workers' well-being, specifically the social well-being.

According to Sobral et al. (2019a) due to the changes occurring in the labour market, it is important to promote practices specially adapted to contingent workers, since temporary agency workers have a peculiar employment relationship, demands, and necessities.

“Contingent work is often associated with uncertainty and insecurity, which, in turn, is related with negative outcomes” (Sobral et al., 2019a, p.4) by impacting well-being.

Therefore, the results of their research are intended to “contribute to a better understanding of managing TAWs in agencies and client companies” (Sobral, et al., 2019a, p.1). This management would imply the application of good HRP that are meant to be “a valuable method for “communicating” with these workers, who are then able to recognize and respond to the investment” (Sobral, et al., 2019a, p.1) made on them.

Sobral et al. (2019b) wanted to underline the fact that in contrast with other types of workers, the ones hired under standard agreements, temporary agency workers “create a double work relation and companies should be aware of this matter. The spillover effect that the relationship with one company can have on the other shows that companies must build a joined management strategy, which can lead to (a) a better perception of the work relation TAW create with both; and (b) better work outcomes” (Sobral et al., 2019b, p.27), which in turn can affect overall well-being.

Sobral et al. (2021) in their research wanted to highlight the fact that when well-being is impacted, it can result in agency workers' lack of motivation, and they decided to present the issue through the Self-Determination Theory (SDT).

In sum, the literature suggests that multiple factors might have an impact on temporary workers' well-being in its three dimensions, for instance related to non-involvement, lack of motivation and commitment, sense of work instability and willingness to churn. The acknowledgment of this impact will be essential for managers from both parties to improve the management of these workers.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research objectives

The aim of this research project is to contribute to the identification of the factors that can have a significant impact on agency workers' well-being, including the analysis of their work environment. This triangular work relationship involves a client company, an employment agency, and a worker, and is currently perceived to be a short-term relationship, normally associated with reduced employees' involvement. This study aims to identify practices that might have an impact on these workers' well-being. Based on the identification of these factors, the implications drawn from this research are expected to help client companies' managers and human resources (HRs)/agencies better manage temporary agency workers.

Therefore, the question that the study intends to answer is:

What are the main factors that have an impact on temporary agency workers' well-being?

This research will be focused on the key concepts included in the research question: (1) temporary agency work, and (2) well-being taking into account its three dimensions: psychological well-being, physical well-being, and social well-being. The study was designed to gather information and insights both from people's past work experiences and current ones, but always within the same work arrangement, to better contribute to the research in question. Moreover, it also aims to shed additional light on the way this non-standard work environment has evolved bringing new challenges to the workers involved. At the same time, to find comparisons between conditions of agency workers and workers directly hired by the companies, especially when working closely at the same workplace.

3.2 Interview structure and design

The interview started with a short presentation about the study objectives, as the main theme, the purpose, and the expected contribution of this research, followed by information that such a study is for academic purposes only. A request was made to be able to record the contents.

The interview was structured in 40 questions, but it has been applied in a semi structured format. The interview protocol is available in appendix, and given its semi-structured nature, it can be seen as a starting point that evolves according to the conversation with the interviewees. Indeed, some questions could have been repeated to allow the listener to better comprehend or maybe be slightly modified to clarify the question itself, and sometimes the order of the questions has not been respected. The interviewer was concerned with creating a more relaxed environment, let the workers feel comfortable, and ease the communication. The initial questions were generally generated to gather some personal information as age, nationality, country of work, educational and professional background. All the other ones were indicative of the experience lived by being part of a triangular work arrangement and have therefore work relationships with two companies. These questions included for instance, the advantages or disadvantages related to standard and non-standard work contract and general differences encountered, relationship built with both the business client and the temporary agency, communication, support felt, the team and the environment around, the overall well-being and factors which could have affected it, actions took or to be taken to improve it, existence and contents of the retention plan, motivation and commitment, health and safety conditions at work or as benefits provided by the contract or lack of these conditions. Moreover, some questions were broader and others more specific and straight to the point. According to the topic asked in the questions and the answer received, it was possible to create certain themes around topics and identify some patterns, which are then presented in the analysis chapter.

Half of the interviews were virtually held via meetings as video or phone calls, and the other half was held in person with the workers. For the ones virtually taken, I was able to take them at my place, mainly in my room to avoid disturbing my housemates and in order not to have the sound ruined by surrounding external noises.

However, for the ones taken in person, for a few it was possible to record them at my place and with some in two different parks in the city I am currently living in. When the interviews were taken at my place, the option was the living room to provide them with a more comfortable environment as also the space is big, and a lot of light enters the room. This certainly when the space was available to create a sort of cosy space as well. One interview was held in a park, rather small but not that crowded so as not to distract the worker, while two other interviews occurred in a bigger park where it was possible to create

our own space with no interference from other people. In both scenarios the days were sunny, and the air was refreshing. It was pleasant being sitting on a bench and sheltered by trees.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

A qualitative approach was adopted via in-depth interviews since they have the power to provide more insights and details, such as workers' personal feelings and points of view about the issue at stake. The questions made during the interviews concerned all relevant issues regarding people's feelings, for instance, in terms of their well-being, job insecurity, supervisors' contribution, and work conditions. These are all issues for instance, which might have an impact on workers' overall well-being.

The data was gathered through anonymous and recorded interviews, after an informed consent was formally permitted by the interviewees, before starting the interviews with these workers, who had or still have this type of work arrangement. The interviews were all transcribed and subject to thematic analysis. The respondents were informed that the information provided will not be disclosed but kept confidential and only used for academic purposes. The interviews were held in English. The target was to reach a number of interviews that allows for the saturation of the data.

Data were gathered from in-depth interviews with workers, who were or are still part of a triangular work relationship. The decision to collect data in this way was useful to get main takeaways and deep insights from these involved workers, and in order to perceive their feelings, emotions, and some introspections.

As the main concern in this work is related to workers, the qualitative approach was considered the best way to obtain deep information about their well-being.

To analyse the qualitative data obtained, a thematic analysis was adopted following the procedure suggested by Braun and Clarke in their paper "*Using thematic analysis in psychology*" (2006, pp. 77-101), where they indicate "We argue, a rigorous thematic approach can produce an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.97). They informed in their work that "thematic analysis is a method for

identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). The authors Braun and Clarke (2006) also sustain that despite being a less known method in research, it is widely used within psychology to analyse qualitative data, and it helps analyse these kinds of data in a more accessible and flexible way. Moreover, they indicate that this method is useful for researchers who are at the early stage of their qualitative research career.

They added that generally “qualitative approaches are incredibly diverse, complex and nuanced, so thematic analysis could be applied as a foundational method for qualitative analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78).

Indeed, they argued that “through its theoretical flexibility, the thematic analysis provides a useful research tool, which can then potentially include a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78).

As Braun and Clarke indicated that “Thematic analysis can be a method that works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.81), as “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82).

“The extracts in thematic analysis are descriptive of the analytic points the researcher makes about the data and should be used to illustrate/support an analysis that goes beyond their specific content, to make sense of the data, and tell the reader what it does or might mean as discussed” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.94) in the literature review section, and then reflected in the findings for instance.

Braun and Clarke (2006) in their work explained how this analysis is conducted, which includes two levels. The first level “involves reviewing the coded data extracts, and it means that the researcher needs to read all the collected extracts for each theme and consider whether they appear to form a coherent pattern” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91).

This first level includes several phases which are the followings:

- familiarisation with the data by reading them and taking notes,
- generation of initial codes which can be related to the content of the entire data set or limited features of it, as potential patterns, or segments of data,
- search for themes by sorting the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes,

- review of the themes since they should adhere together in a meaningful way, and they should be easily identifiable and clearly distinct.

(Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 77-101)

The level two is similar to level one, but this process considers “the validity of individual themes in relation to the full data set, but also to the candidate thematic map, which should ‘accurately’ reflect the meanings evident in the data set as a whole” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91). The authors clarified that “at the end of this phase, a researcher should have a fairly good idea of what the different themes are, how they fit together, and the overall story they tell about the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92). The level two includes two phases, which are:

- definition and attribution of names to the themes, by defining the ‘essence’ of what each theme is about and what aspect of data each theme was able to capture,
- production of the report, by telling the complicated story behind the data set to convince the reader about the analysis.

(Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 77-101)

An example of the application of the thematic approach can be provided by Guest in his research “*Human resource management and employee well-being: towards a new analytic framework*” (2017, pp. 22-38), where he developed a conceptual map trying to explain how both high employee well-being and a positive employment relationship can have an impact on overall individual and company performance (Guest, 2017). By focusing on these two subjects, he regrouped thematic aspects related to human resources practices that may be employed to improve well-being and work relationships. The practices have been separated in several themes and each theme contains different perspectives, as for instance one macro theme related to a practice to be adopted is organisational support, which is intended as supportive management, involving environment, flexible and adaptable work arrangement, and developmental performance management (Guest, 2017). Also in his research, the focus on well-being covers its three dimensions, the psychological, physical, and social well-being, which are affected by these employed practices. At the same time, these practices are able to build positive work relationships, sustained by a sense of trust, and security for instance. The consequence is that both workers and companies can benefit from those and improve their overall performance (Guest, 2017).

The chapter 4 is indeed dedicated to the findings derived by the conducted interviews. It is divided into six macro themes covering different arguments each one of them, and each of these containing different related perspectives which were brought up by the interviewees. For instance, one theme is about support and work environment and covers many related and/or shared perspectives regarding the topic.

3.3.1 Primary data collection

As previously indicated, data were gathered directly from a first-hand source, which in this case is the interview to people, who had or still have an experience with temporary agency work. Precisely, ten people have been interviewed and all belong to the age range from 20 to 40. All of them are currently living and working in Portugal. Some of them are foreigners, the remaining are Portuguese, including Portuguese people with experiences abroad. Some of the interviewed workers have a degree while others have a high school diploma. Most of them are still from the tourism sector and a few currently belong to other kinds of sectors. For most of them the current experience was the first as an agency worker while a few had previous experiences within the same work agency or other agencies. For most of the interviewed workers, there is no distinction between working for a company and being directly hired by another company. This may lead to think that generally people are not that aware of how a triangular work relationship works, and which kind of different work relationships are involved in the agreement.

A table summarises the personal information regarding these workers including their background information about work agreement Figure 1. Names are both invented and/or part of nicknames to preserve the anonymity of the participants.

Name	Age	Gender	Nationality	Residence	Education	Sector	Current job	Agency work experience	Year of experience as agency worker	Total job career	Current work contract
Alba	27	Female	Italian	Portugal	Diploma	Tourism	Quality Assurance	1	1	3	direct employment
Ana	33	Female	Portuguese	Portugal	Master	Tourism	Customer Service	1	6 months	3	agency work
Barbi	26	Female	Portuguese	Portugal	Bachelor	Tourism	Help Support	2	2	2	agency work
Dama	25	Female	Mexican	Portugal	Bachelor	Architecture	Designer	1	3 months	4	direct employment
Edo	29	Male	Brazilian	Portugal	Bachelor	Finance	Account and Sales	1	1	3	direct employment
Ela	27	Female	Italian	Portugal	Diploma	Tourism	Customer Service	1	7 months	4	agency work
Lewis	33	Male	Brazilian	Portugal	Diploma	Tourism	Fraud Support	3	5 + 4 months	3	agency work
Masha	22	Female	Moldavian	Portugal	Diploma	Tourism	Real Time Analyst	1	1 + 3 months	2	agency work
Mary	37	Female	Portuguese	Portugal	Bachelor	Hospitality	Customer Service	1	3 months	2	agency work
Tobias	32	Male	Portuguese	Portugal	Diploma	IT	Help Desk Technician	2	2+ 5 months	4	direct employment

Figure 1: Personal information of the dataset

4 FINDINGS

As indicated in the previous chapter, the objective of the study is to better understand the management of temporary agency workers and the factors that may impact their overall well-being. Therefore, the focus is mainly on temporary agency workers and well-being, which also covers its three dimensions related to psychological well-being, physical well-being, and social well-being. Relevant information and insights both from people's past work experiences and/or current ones were gathered and sometimes compared, but always prioritising the takeaways related to this triangular work arrangement, to better contribute to the research in question.

The use of the thematic analysis allowed to identify some critical aspects that can be impacted and divide this chapter in six different sections, by creating a theme for each section according to the opinions and affirmations shared by the participants for each topic.

4.1 Communication

When a communication needs to be shared and spread, usually it is easier to deliver the message between two parties as from A to B, but if a third party is involved as C, it gets harder.

Barbi expressed that the communication could get complicated as many requests need to be reported first to the work agency and then the agency reports those concerns to the client company. This can cause long waiting time and in consequence turn in an impossibility to manage a work-life balance promptly. She pointed out that people have a life to organise besides the job. She also affirmed that the communication would be easier if she had the possibility to make requests directly to the client company or under a direct employment.

Lewis also found a lack of communication among these three parties involved in the contract, because for any important doubt or issue related to salary and paid hours, for instance, they need first to communicate with the agency which in turn transmits the information to the client company. In addition, he believes that some sort of communication is not shared and spread equally among co-workers. Every communication

needs to be addressed via email which he thinks is useful because everything is tracked down, but it does not ease the exchange of information sometimes for small matters. He suggested the use of other means of communication to deliver brief messages to just prevent small problems from becoming magnified. Moreover, he pointed out the importance of having conversations to solve issues as well.

Indeed, on one occasion he felt misunderstood in the way he communicated via email with his HR regarding a problem with his payslip.

So, he highlighted the importance of being open to communication and developing communication skills, knowing how to approach people, especially the agency. He realised that companies tend to have agency workers because they do not want to hire people or being worried about salary for instance, but this triangular system needs to be improved, specifically in terms of communication and personal relationships.

What he believes is that work agencies should also focus more on delivering better expectations and information about the job itself, tasks to be accomplished, type of contracts, some labour laws and rights, bonuses, conditions, so in a sense better guide the temporary agency worker. He found for instance that from his experience, he got different information from some new co-workers and the realisation of this unequally shared information increases general workers' frustration, negatively impacting their well-being.

Based on her previous experience as a temporary worker, Dama has currently a direct employment contract and is best placed to compare the two arrangements. By being directly employed, she has the chance now to talk directly with the business client and without any filter. Also, the contract she signed was fully explained by them. When asked to clarify the interaction she had with the temporary agency work, she answered:

"I don't think that with the agency I had a relationship, and they didn't want to invest time on this. At the beginning I remember a sort of presentation of the supervisor of HR and the role they play as representing the agency work. Then they just disappeared, and randomly out of nothing you were receiving emails about maybe your behaviour or the things you were supposed to do to record your attendance in some specific systems. But they didn't even explain these procedures and took them for granted, So, I don't think it was very good communication." (Dama)

While when asked about the relationships with the management of the business client and co-workers in her previous experience, she stated:

"I don't think I had a direct connection with the client and direct management. I didn't have a lot of communication with them. With the co-workers you always communicated and received help if you had a doubt...I think that the co-workers were the first contact to receive help." (Dama)

For the last question Dama was asked if she had something else to add and maybe relevant to the topic and she basically restated what previously affirmed adding some details:

The HR didn't help a lot. I didn't ask for help, but I knew from other co-workers' experience that they asked for help and for explanations about meal cards and small stuff and the HR people should help with this. Moreover, you are a foreigner, and they should help. They didn't give any useful link or more developed reply but almost automatic reply...Mostly it is a communication problem. Communication was always via email and didn't have any face-to-face contact." (Dama)

Ela has a similar experience with both the work agency and the corporate company.

"As a foreigner I didn't have all the documentation that I need to work as a European worker to work here, and they just sent this kind of document without guiding you and explaining what this document is, and why you have to do it and you have to figure it out by yourself. Since the beginning they didn't explain how things work with them, as for example if there were some specific tools that we needed to use. I think there is a lack of communication and miscommunication. There is no help...so you really have to understand yourself how to move, and this both with the client company and the employment agency." (Ela)

From Ana's point of view, the communication should be improved to then improve the well-being:

"The drawback is related to communication. It's more complex than it was when I was directly hired by a company. You have to go via different channels to ask for something. There are more people involved in the agreement and within it, and the communication doesn't flow as well. The recruitment company should improve communication and make things clearer when you pretend some answers...I feel that they rely a lot on the company that is managing you. I think that they should implement some meetings to check how we are doing, our feelings. From the company I think about working on communication as well. I feel that if they cared more, maybe people would stay longer." (Ana)

“I would like more human interactions when there’s an issue. It’s all by email or chats, which is also important because you have to have all the information written down, but a more human contact.” (Ana)

Like Ana, Mary also agrees that the communications with the work agency is quite difficult at times, as many people treat a person’s request, and it can get confusing and time demanding. In addition, she also considered that it would be good to have for instance sometime or once a month meeting with work agency to try to know what their workers feel, if they are, or not, well integrated in the team, how they feel about the jobs that they are doing and gather their perspectives on all these issues. She clarified that the fact of being listed would improve a lot the well-being:

“If the employee feels that there’s not someone listening to their concerns. Then it will affect the employee. Because you feel better when you see that there’s someone listening to you and to your concern, and about the way that you feel about something.” (Mary)

Alba also shares the same opinion as Mary, arguing that the wellbeing of the worker would get better, if beneficial actions were taken by the work agency when leading agency workers, and this would have a huge impact on the life of the person but also in the job itself. Therefore, she pointed out the importance of improving the communication:

“Well, I think that both companies involved should take beneficial actions. In my current job I see that there’s a lot of lack of communication between how the contract works and what the employees are aware of. In each country there should be the need to make sure that the employee is aware about everything because you’re investing your time there. I don’t see that this facilitation takes place sometimes...it seems that sometimes there is not the willingness to really make a person comfortable there but just let this person work. While they should care more about the person as an individual itself.” (Alba)

4.2 Support and work environment

The way workers feel about being supported or not, can also have an impact on well-being. Barbi stated that she felt and kept feeling supported by the fellow colleagues and team leader, but from the management of the work agency not that much. She mentions that sometimes she does not feel that they are listened to, and that as a third party, they just have to follow procedures and meet the goals or established metrics from the client

company. None is there for them when they feel stressed or overwhelmed with the job. On the contrary, she can always speak with the team when she needs it.

The worker Lewis told that in a previous experience, always related to temporary work but with another agency, he had a burnout because the job was new, and anyone had enough experiences to help him out and support him. At the moment instead, he feels that he gets generally enough support, and he also believes that he has good relations with both parties of the triangular relationship. After all, he insisted that in general it is not the agency work the problem, but the people who work in a work agency and hire temporary workers, since these people at times are not aligned with the agency workers and to whom they are responsible to some extent.

At the same time Ana declared that she is not connected with the agency she is working for.

Unlike the previous interviewees, Masha finds that the environment and the team are nice, they have a mutual respect relationship. However, she does not always feel supported by the management of the direct company, while the agency work seems to be flexible, and she has never had issues with them.

Dama has great memories about the good environment in her previous work as temporary agent as many workers were foreigners and living a similar situation to hers, so besides the job, the team was the best part. In the current one she does not feel the same connection or made friendships, but the environment is also good. Moreover, she recalled that in general it was useful to have a coach in the past as an agency worker, because it helped her a lot to understand her feelings, meaning that it is very important having someone to talk to, to show one's feelings, and help achieve better scores. In her current job, she also has a colleague helping her out with any question or doubt. She does retain that the team, that is direct colleagues, was the most supportive and helpful in terms of assistance, but sometimes they didn't get enough support from coaches or team leaders who should have helped them specially with work operations on a daily basis.

Edo as some of the interviewed workers clarified that he did not feel supported for any kind from the companies involved in the triangular relationship, besides complicated

bureaucracy related to simple tasks and requests. Apart from that the team was nice with great people within it. On the other hand, the environment in which he is currently working can be felt as healthier, according to what he mentioned:

“At the moment amazing because I do work for one company and I have the sense of belonging of a common goal, and I can see results of what I’m doing reflected on the company and on my job, and in the previous one no.” (Edo)

The fact that he was not receiving support was impacting a lot on his overall well-being, because he was not feeling prepared to request help or assistance from anyone. Edo was feeling as just a resource to be exploited without receiving anything in return, just be demanded without receiving something in return or having the possibility to rebut. In addition to that, he had the perception that there was no attempt to listen and cooperate by the recruitment agency, affirming that if they listen to the contractors, and try to improve their wellness, and benefits, it won’t be a temporary work maybe, it could open doors to a permanent position even by being a third party. He underlined the importance of communication but in terms of active listening and support. Instead, he felt they showed no minding and caring.

A point that is shared both by Edo and Ela is about the overall perception of the work environment, as they both retained that it is the unhealthiest environment. Ela also added to the matter that she believes that there is no caring about employees and instead there is a lot of expectations from them with a lack of a good management of such workers from both sides. This altogether and as a consequence, has an impact on her well-being, according to what she indicated:

“I think that my well-being at work is not good. To be an agency they have to take care of the needs of the employees and can respect the workers. The employment agency should be the agency that gives you the possibility to grow up in terms of skills, in terms of goals and consequently other responsibilities.” (Ela)

In terms of feelings about the team around her, Ela shared the same great experience that Dama lived, as both are working as foreigners, and agency workers in an international context. Moreover, they both agreed on the importance of having a coach, as they are seen to be very supportive. This indeed was made clear from Ela’s words too:

“I think that the coach shows more humanity and I feel rewarded by them but not from both management.”
(Ela)

In addition to the question wondering if she was getting enough support she stated:

“By the co-workers and coach yes, but by the management and employment agency no, because we have already tried to explain things, for example the stressful calls, expectations from the metrics that are high, but they didn’t care.” (Ela)

These statements pointed out the importance of support and relationships in the work context, so the interactions that people can have and the recognition as human beings with needs. On the contrary bonuses and extra money that a worker can earn, according to maybe some goals or metrics reached and set by the business client, are not seen as a reward, but taken for granted as a consequence of a right compensation due to hard work and dedication.

From Ela’s point of view, there was no attempt from both companies to take actions to improve workers’ overall well-being, especially from the client as its priority is to achieve some results and these results are all in terms of money basically. Moreover, she underlined some actions which both companies could take that could improve this sentiment, such as active listening, in accordance with what also Edo mentioned. As these companies work mainly with people and not with computers, for Ela they have to realise that people have specific needs. She clarified that active listening could be beneficial in return even for the work agency. She pointed out that if the work agencies know how their employees are and feel, they can understand if they are going in the right direction, and if their employees share the same goals.

“If you don’t have active listening in regards with your employees then you don’t know how the entire system is working and where you can increase your system.” (Ela)

As some of the interviewed workers, Ana shares the same feeling of having different kinds of relationship but a sort of separations among the direct colleagues on one side, and the management of the company for which she is working and the agency by which she was hired on the other side:

“One is healthy, and another is not. The feeling that you get is that you have no control of anything that happens with your employer, because you are an outsourcing employee and do not even have the possibility to talk with the company you are representing to change things. You are just there doing your service and have to follow procedures and it takes away your mental well-being in the long run, I believe, because you feel that

you are not part of anything. Then you have colleagues who are very nice. It helps to balance it up. In general, I don't feel that I belong to the recruitment agency.” (Ana)

However, Ana recalled an unpleasant situation that occurred and at the end the work agency stood by her side and understood the problem and tried to fix it:

“The recruitment company, when they found out about it, stood by my side. They had to maintain the professional relationship with the company which they are providing people to, but I felt that they were kind and understood what I was saying. The issue finally was resolved by them.” (Ana)

Mary found generally the environment around her to be nice, especially the team always ready to support her and help by answering to any of her doubts or questions on a particular topic, but with the direct management and the work agency she does not have any kind of contact and therefore, any relationship. When she had instead a direct employment contract, she affirmed that she was feeling more part of an entire team, of the business itself.

The same experiences were lived by Tobias as he described:

“At the moment the work environment is very healthy. I can work from home or from the office, so flexibility and co-workers are great as well and teach me a lot, so overall stimulating...In the past experiences nothing I've described before, the only exception were the co-workers themselves that were nice, but the rest was very strict on every measure we can think of, according to metrics, break times, leave times, workplace, everything was so strict, measured and created a lot of stress for everyone and not healthy in the long term.” (Tobias)

When Tobias was asked if he noticed some clear actions taken by the client company and agency work management to improve workers and employees' conditions, he stated:

“The temporary agency just reports to the client, and they do not make any effort to change.” (Tobias)

When asked instead about what actions should an employment agency take that he sees to be more beneficial when leading temporary agency workers, he suggested:

“They would need to change the whole business model because the way they operate is just completely wrong from my point of view, they would need to stop offering full time positions, because if they are hiring in that sense, they should set that the final contract is with the client. In this way instead, everything is in between like assistance with payment and holidays, and we can speak just with HR because they are our human

resources and what they are supposed to be and not directly with the company we are working for.”
(Tobias)

As many of his fellow workers, Tobias informed that he did not receive any kind of support from the temporary work agency, underlying instead how the situation changed with a standard work relationship:

“In the current one I speak directly with my operational managers and interact with those people and discuss problems and try to achieve great results, and I have so far, some kind of support, because I feel that I’m part of it. I can see some improvement.” (Tobias)

In the words of Alba, it is clear that even the work environment can have an impact on the overall well-being:

“I feel that my work environment is mainly stressed even though there is a lot of collaboration between people and is fluid, the frustration it’s very present in our daily routine...Some days you are dropped down because of discontentment and it’s not an environment that is consistent and that follows you in a healthy way...this shakes you from one side to the other of your emotional being or your physical being, and this is very tiring.” (Alba)

4.3 Turnover and retention plan

Barbi in the interview affirmed that both companies have a retention plan but in the sense that when they see that a person wants to resign and they are interested in that person’s skills and capabilities, they try to keep and convince that person to stay.

Lewis instead is quite uncertain about the topic, sometimes he thinks that both companies have a retention plan, other times it does not seem like they have one. He argued that there are some workers there who will stay for a short period of time because maybe they are also studying at the moment, or they have other personal projects to pursue but there are other people instead who are waiting to build a career at the client company. He added that he feels that generally both companies do not give much importance to the person itself and then maybe the worker quit because he does not feel welcome there, or that there are no conditions to work there anymore. In his company, he admitted that they are not famous for having people working for a long time, most of the staff is always changing,

except for the management people from both the client company and the agency work and/or HR.

Masha believes, contrary to what previously indicated, that both companies do not have a retention plan, and instead, they should develop it to transmit to people a sense of stability, possibility to retain one's job, be stable, and safe. Sometimes she sees people being fired and/or leaving and she feels like she is going to be the next.

The agency worker Dama shares the same opinion of Masha and informed about the retention plan to be developed:

"I think yes, they should develop it. This is because there are a lot of people leaving or about to leave. I also felt that when they hire you, they don't give all the helpful and related information about the work itself. So, I don't know if they do this to attract you and keep you there, but when you start the job, you see that it has nothing to do with the promises made." (Dama)

The worker Ela provided more or less the same point of view about the loss of trust, and the fact that the information in the agency contract is not well described, while for her instead, people who have a direct employment relationship can find on their contracts all the helpful information needed as work situation, terms and conditions of the contract itself and duration. In addition, regarding the retention plan and focusing more on the work of the temporary agency itself, she stated:

"They should have and develop this because until now already some co-workers left the company due to the situation, the management, the salary, the organisation. The employees try to explain the situation but nothing changes. I really think that they have to actively listen to the employees and try to figure out a way to satisfy people that are working for them and not only the client." (Ela)

"Probably the agency at times tries to hire people to let them work, but they don't really care about these people and their experiences, so someone then can lose their trust. Then, I think there is a sort of stereotypic thinking about this kind of work agreement...when you are hired from an employment agency you don't have a big expectation of the work. Maybe you accept this kind of agreement because you are in a specific period/ situation, and you need money." (Ela)

What Edo mentioned about the retention plan is kind of aligned with Ela thought:

“Completely, they should change and develop it otherwise there will always be this dynamic, people getting enough and leaving...They just need you to fulfil their requests...to fill a gap, a number. Now at my current company they do have a retention plan. They do want to retain people and do work for the well-being of the employees.” (Edo)

Like Edo, Ana also perceived that there is a difference in the sense of belonging to the company if you are directly hired or if you are a third party in the work relationship:

“Basically, in terms of plans for the future, you cannot plan because it is not that stable, and usually the kind of jobs that are likely to be temporary or outsourcing have a very quick turnaround. The environment is always changing, the employees are always changing so your environment is not stable and different to traditional jobs.” (Ana)

While referring to the relationship between the employee and the employer Ana affirmed:

“From what I’ve lived before, I think that when you have a direct contract the communication is easier, you have to be part of the company, you have to be a part of the product and the change. You get more comfortable with people around you, and stable...you get to know people longer. There is a company culture that is clearer to you. You get to think ahead more and mentally is healthier.” (Ana)

She concluded on the topic that both companies are not concerned about the retention plan and would be important to develop it to prevent some happenings and improve the working relationship.

Ana also pointed out that all her close colleagues are also outsourced while the people supervising are directly hired, and therefore at that level there is a lot of rotation. This scenario is presented by Dama as well.

For Mary both companies involved should develop a retention plan and she suggested a Psychology Department as one possible action taken which could help retaining workers, as the turnover is high in her work reality. Moreover, by being more focused on how people feel and developing such a plan, it would help workers realise that the companies care about their well-being. Furthermore, she added that usually companies have slogans to incentivise workers and create loyalty, as for instance ‘people first’ or ‘we are one team’. Anyway, in Mary’s opinion the company needs to be that first and avoid just

communicating it in words because they should instead take concrete actions to let the workers feel that way.

Tobias as Mary, and many other of the interviewed workers thought that both companies are not concerned with retention, and instead they should develop it:

“At least try to understand why a person is leaving and they should create a sort of plan and provide solutions for those that want to leave, and prevent workers from even getting to that way, to feel that pain.”
(Tobias)

To sum up, as already indicated by some of these workers, Alba does believe too that both companies belonging to a triangular relationship should be concerned about workers’ retention, and that currently there is no plan developed yet at her work environment. In addition to that, she referred to turnover as a lack of humanity in regards with workers:

“Definitely they should develop it. This is one of the drawbacks of the temporary job. Like this capitalistic system of thinking about people just to reach a goal but when you don’t need it anymore you just ignore them. Also, for them people can be easily replaced with others. This shows a lack of humanity. I don’t see that there is the needed action to show attention and valorise people, and a lot should be improved.” (Alba)

4.4 Job instability and contract inequality

The worker Barbi informed that the temporary job that she got was an opportunity that allowed her to study and work from home, at first and during the pandemic, and most of the job offers at that moment were provided by these work agencies. However, she underlined the fact that with this current work arrangement, workers in Portugal cannot ask a bank for loans for buying a car or house, at least from what she is aware of. She suggested partnership with banks as well to support these kinds of workers, since some of them can also have families and a loan would be beneficial to sustain loved ones.

Also, she pointed out some differences in terms of the facilities temporary agency workers cannot access, differently from direct employees. For instance, she cannot access the parking area around the company building and the one located underground. Also, at the company anyone can be identified, and categorised, since the ones directly hired by the client company have a specific badge, and the temporary agency workers, maybe from

different agencies, have their corresponding badges as well. This worker generally supposed that the work conditions in terms of salary and benefits are better for the ones directly hired by a client company.

Barbi also clarified that for students, temporary agency work can be a great solution, especially when one is looking for just something temporary. On the other hand, if a person wants to be stable and make a career, it can become harder. Moreover, she felt that her team needed to complain a lot about work conditions and they, as agency workers, were finally able to see an increase in the salary for instance.

Anyway, she believes that the contracts sometimes are not clear and specially when they are of permanent type, it gets confusing understanding when the worker will be directly hired by a client company, or after how many years an increase in the salary will be set and granted.

In general, Barbi finds that a job obtained via this work arrangement is a normal job but informed that she did not have any other different experiences to compare.

On the other hand, Lewis admitted that he almost targeted that company and to be able to be directly hired, he needed first to be hired by the employment service. If he had the choice, he is not sure if he would prefer to be directly hired because he realised that the direct employment type has issues as well.

In terms of contract benefits, he also agreed to what Barbi said, that is that people directly hired can have more advantages and their contract is more powerful, since they can request for loans and have access to special bank accounts, and a better health insurance. In terms of access to work facilities, he found that there are no differences in the place he works.

Ela agrees that she could have easy access to all the facilities of the business client.

However, Lewis realised that within his company the ones directly hired usually belong to the upper organisational and managerial team, while the positions covered by agency workers are the ones related to a lower organisational level.

Overall, he stated that a job obtained via temporary agency work is a normal job, and he would implicitly think that is a bad job, if it were related to cleaning and catering service. He clarified that there are some jobs commonly known to be temporary, as seasonal jobs, for instance during summer or Christmas time, but also in other situations like the call centre that he does believe these are normal jobs.

However, he wanted to inform that according to his previous experiences as agency workers hired by different work agencies, he got different benefits in terms of health insurance and transportation fees. An agency work provided some benefits which worked differently from the other one or according to the time spent in the same work agency some benefits were conceded or not. To conclude, the agencies work in different ways and their contracts can provide different benefits.

As Barbi could find just job offers via temporary agencies, the same Masha experienced while looking for a job in the tourism industry, more than a year ago and close to covid time. She does believe that there is no implicit assumption that it is a bad job, and that a person can get a great job by starting to be hired first with such a work agreement. Nevertheless, she would have preferred direct employment since she considers that direct employees have more benefits in terms of vacation days and a higher salary, but also, they can get a feeling of work and life stability. Masha finds a contract with no fixed term with the agency to be a double-edged sword, since the workers can quit whenever they want, and the agencies can fire whenever they want as well, causing an advantage and disadvantage at the same time. Overall, in her point of view, the contract should be clearer at times and indicate how much time needs to be spent within the same work agency to obtain a direct employment with a company and include specifications about salary raise that are not always immediate and clear. Moreover, she believes that she has easy access to all facilities of the client company.

Like the other interviewees, when searching for a job online, Dama also found many job opportunities with this kind of work agreement and could not find, at that moment, many vacancies for direct employment. She also felt that the agencies were hiring foreigners mostly because of the type of job, as customer service in several languages for instance, while the direct employment was more offered to qualified and skilled professionals like engineers and high levels of management. Yet, she did not assume that it was a bad job, as there may always be worse conditions, in terms of payment and contract. When she was working in a restaurant as a waitress, she had no kind of contract and was supposed to be paid daily. She could not get paid properly and was almost just receiving the tips from clients most of the time. Regarding the temporary agency work, she also retains as Masha

and Lewis that the contract should be clearer also in terms of obtainable bonuses, which are eventually part of the payslip, and therefore final salary received.

For Edo, the option to choose employment via agency work was the lack of knowledge at that time, about what was going to happen, since he saw it as a regular kind of job, however he would have preferred a direct employment as any other worker interviewed and presented so far. He stated that he would never apply again for a job with such a work arrangement. In terms of differences in benefits between temporary agency work and direct employment, he did not find that to be the case.

Moreover, he felt that he did not have access to all the facilities of the client company, as for instance they did not have access to a studying platform provided by the business client, because that is exclusively for directly business employees. Also, the temporary agency workers could not use the parking spots provided by the client company because they were reserved for direct employees. This latter drawback was indicated by the worker Barbi as well. He added a few words about the differences in terms of salary and recognized that part of the salary is taken out by the agency work and for him it can get frustrating.

On the contrary when referring to the drawbacks related to a direct work agreement, he did not have anything to say, but about the benefits he pointed out:

“The benefits are that you are working directly for the company hiring and see the results directly of the work, you can request things directly with HR, director, managers, and team leader. You can also negotiate in a better way. And you have a sense of belonging...the feeling that you have shared goals and maybe you can be listened to, in order to improve and get better results.” (Edo)

Like Dama, Ela also experienced the possibility of finding a job at that time just via temporary agencies as a foreigner in a new country. If it were up to her, she would prefer to be directly hired, because she retains that workers are more in touch with the company itself when directly hired, since they work close. Ela, as Edo, doesn't see any negative aspects, at least not from what she has experienced before with a direct contract. On the contrary, for the employment service contract, she pointed out that a person signs a contract, but in the contract are not indicated the conditions for a long-term relationship, therefore it causes a sense of instability as you cannot perceive any guarantee. The only benefit she found is related to the fact that generally it is easier to find a job since agencies

have a lot of connections, and they can gather a person's CV, and general information and introduce that person to the correct or more specific area of interest. However, she also mentioned that she had an experience as a freelancer and found some differences about the types of employment:

"The most difficult thing for me is, as a freelancer, managing the budget, setting the price, thinking of the target market, and taking care of your experiences. If you work with an agency instead, you just have basically to respect the working hours, and technically everything else is managed by the agency. You just have to do your duty and respect in this case the metrics set and that's it." (Ela)

The agency worker Ana did not mention how she found the job and how it was advertised, but she highlighted the fact that she accepted this work agreement because she was in need. Otherwise, she would have preferred a standard work relationship. However, she found that right now the organisation of the work is more versatile and that she can easily request for some specific days off or a permission to leave for a few hours to be then compensated. In Ana's perspective the job found with temporary recruitment companies/outsourcing companies would not be considered as bad. However, people commonly are aware that is probably not going to last. So, what she believes is that it can be seen as a good job, if a person is replacing someone in pregnancy leave, or sick leave and then the person substituted is going to return. Ana also feels that there is a sort of disconnection with this type of work arrangement:

"I feel as a number in this moment and not a person with other experiences and those experiences are valued and this didn't happen with the other companies. They always took advantage in a good way. They gave me the chance to experience and improve or grow...So, the other companies valued my individuality as a person with experiences and personally, and in this case, I don't feel that." (Ana)

Mary also agreed with Ana and others in saying that temporary agency work is a good option, and sees it as an advantage, if a person has willingness to have that job for a short period of time and not to build a long work relationship. On the other hand, she also confirmed that she accepted this kind of work agreement because she was in need, as she recently came back to Portugal, and found this opportunity when looking for a job. If it were up to her, she would have also opted for direct employment, as she realised that a person could have more possibilities to grow professionally, increasing one's motivation. Anyway, a drawback pointed out, refers to the fact that if a company decides to fire the

employee, the employee then has to find another job, while on the contrary, under the agency work type the agency would need to help the employee find another solution and relocate. This is considered by Mary as another point in favour of agency work.

Another point that Mary found to be generally negative and impacting temporary agency workers is the not being attractive for new companies in the labour market:

“Because I believe that when you put on your CV that you work only for one temporary agency, sometimes it's not taken seriously...That can have a negative impact in these people and in their well-being because at the end they don't feel like that someone can look at their value...It's like they are not recognised like good professional.” (Mary)

To sum up Mary does not believe that there's an implicit assumption that this kind of work agreement can lead to a bad job. In her opinion, someone can really find a work path, as for instance if someone is super good at doing something but does not have clear ideas about the steps to make and how to get there, this person can opt first for an alternative or short-term solution represented by the temporary agency work.

Totally contrary to this point of view is Tobias, who believes that this type of work arrangement is immediately viewed as a bad job because people immediately associate those temporary job offerings with not a temporary role itself but the rotation of workers. So, in his belief, a person should be hired temporarily without staying long in the client firm. According to his experiences, he wanted to point out that most of the time the temporary agencies hire workers with permanent contract and full-time positions that are open all year round and at any time, underlining then the fact that it is not a one-time event or seasonal work but standard work type. Moreover, at the end the job is not temporary, and the worker just keeps feeling as another number and not part of that context. Feeling always temporary although one person is present at the workplace, every day, as any other employee. Therefore, he thinks that temporary agencies are helpful in finding temporary jobs according to people's needs, and if the person agrees to the condition, and for a short period of time. He informed that when he was younger, he had a short experience in a catering business with a sort of call contract, as it was usually needed on certain days of the week and it was completely temporary as it was during summer, so seasonal. During this time, he knew that the contract was temporary, and it helped him out getting by, therefore he did not set any kind of expectations both from him and the company itself.

Also, before he started as a temporary agency worker, he was in need as many of the job's advertisements were provided by the temporary companies and not from the final client. Otherwise, he would have preferred a direct contract too. However, Tobias recognizes that a long-term relationship with a client firm can be difficult to handle if the worker has different plans and wishes to quit earlier than expected, reading this as a disadvantage of standard work agreement. All the rest, he thinks that it is positive, as he can have a sense of career path, a voice in the company's doing, he gets knowing who his co-workers will be for a while since there is no rotation of co-workers, and he can speak directly with the company and not via intermediaries, providing a lot of benefits.

Something that he wanted to underline is the fact that when he entered the team, Tobias found a clear setting of goals from the management of the corporate client. Despite that, he did not feel part of the company and therefore, he did not feel like being allowed to express a word about these goals as contribution to improve the company:

"In the previous experiences the goals were set but without any sort of insight from us, like presented and you needed to just follow to reach them. If the target were not reached, then it would have been a problem."
(Tobias)

As Ana and Edo already mentioned, Tobias also felt as just a number that has to achieve goals and meet expectations, without bringing any value or contribution:

"I want to point out that these temporary agencies do not really see as people but worker beings completely available to go by the rules they provide and not authorised to complain...I mean you can complain but it does not make a single different because you are just a number, a position, a role and is ashamed that we still have this unhealthy separation between the client company and the agency work and the worker in the middle." (Tobias)

In regard to the experience lived by the worker Alba, she revealed that when she started her job, at the time via a recruitment agency, she was feeling the need to accept that job so as to earn money and wanted to grow by taking a step out of her comfort zone. After a bit, she received a proper proposal to keep contributing to the company but with direct employment, so she chose to proceed with that journey, and she prefers a direct work

agreement so far. When asked about the advantages and disadvantages related to temporary agency work, she reported:

“I would say that it's like you are aware about how long your journey will be...it's like an opportunity to have a short experience without taking it for too long...I would say that is not a choice that I would recommend if someone looked for stability. Another temporary drawback would also be the environment that you are joining because if it's temporary, possibly, and unluckily you might have left less chance to know people and create a better relationship with your colleagues, so this might also impact your well-being.”
(Alba)

While for the direct employment:

“For the benefits I would say that you have the possibility to work on your career...so this was something motivating me to improve myself as a person and an employee. So, I was feeling more secure, recognized. I would say the drawbacks can be related to something specifically with my company maybe. It's not something that can be applied to any company. It would refer to the structure and the values of the company.” (Alba)

A good aspect from being a direct employee, is also related to the fact that she can have access to basically any facility of the business client as some school platform and services. These facilities were indicated as not admissible for temporary workers by many of the interviewees:

“Some colleagues of mine don't have the same access and maybe due to the type of contract that they have... One thing that is nice, is a space like a platform called University where you can have access to contents, school, and available online psychologists. It is a secure environment in which you can check information on how to meditate, to understand how you deal with stress.” (Alba)

In particular, she stated that she would like to implement a psychological support:

“Something that I would like to implement is a psychologist or at least a person that is introduced to some communicative dynamics in the team and understands how they can be more effective and improve, especially supervisor roles. Sometimes in this kind of job there are people at their level that are not aware about the

impact that they have on people. It would be helpful having a person who understands these dynamics and giving guidance to improve how messages should be delivered and how a specific topic is handled. It would really make a difference on the wellbeing of the workers.” (Alba)

Also concluded that some actions have been taken to improve workers and employees’ conditions, but in her opinion, those were superficial:

“I think that they wanted to just show that they care but at the same time the actions that they were taking were very general and they didn't really make people feel valued.” (Alba)

To conclude for Alba’s consideration, a temporary job shouldn’t be seen as bad. It can be bad the job itself like the role or the position but not the fact that the job itself is temporary.

4.5 Commitment and motivation

Barbi believes that by implementing actions seen to be beneficial when leading temporary agency workers will help improve workers’ well-being and more people would feel attracted to this kind of work arrangements. Her happiness is high, she rated 8 out of 10 but since she wants to be always professional at work, her commitment to the job and goals set by the client company needs to be 10 out of 10. While the motivation is slightly below, around 7 or 8. She also does believe that her job has a purpose, since she has to support people on a daily basis, despite her non-standard contract.

The agency worker Lewis clarified that the job routine is super structured and organised, and this helps him feel organised at work as well, otherwise would feel lost, which is something that was also shared by Ela and seen as a positive aspect. Lewis feels always committed to the job even though it is not his dream job yet. After all, he feels satisfied and quite happy with the job so far. He is motivated to reach the goals and targets set by the client company. What that could motivate him more, would be a higher salary, so now, the motivation is neutral.

He also believes that working with a temporary job for a limited period of time still has a purpose and during his career path at the client company, he was able to improve some

procedures in his department, and therefore he feels that he is quite important for the client and the job itself.

Contrary to what was indicated by Lewis, Masha does not like having fixed schedules as it gets boring, and she is forced to follow a basic routine. That is why, despite the commitment to her job and goals set by the client company, she would rate her happiness around 6 or 7 out of 10, and her general motivation at 5. However, as the previous workers indicated, she also thinks that the temporary agency work for a short time has a purpose.

Dama also agrees with Masha and finds it stressful having rigid schedules, where any break is set and controlled. She could not feel free and almost trapped. Her new job is calmer in the sense that she has more breaks and time to rest during the workday. In terms of job organisation, she thinks that the current one is a bit messy, without clear objectives. In her previous work as a temporary agency worker, the job was super organised in that sense, and in terms of targets to reach. Despite that right now, Dama does feel happy at her job, while in the previous one not at all due to the stressful job itself. Moreover, she was not able to create a sort of separation between work and life, bringing home all the takeaways of the day, the negative ones included. At the question about her commitment to the goals set by the business client she replied:

“They are seeing that I’m working and doing my best, they offered me a real contract, and I think it is rewarding. At the beginning I was also unsure if I was going to stay or if they wanted to fire me. With the contract I’m sure I will feel differently, and more committed. In the previous one I think that I’ve always tried to do my best, and even when I left, they told me that I would always be welcomed there. Even though I didn’t like the job, I think it is good to give a good impression and try to do your best and show your commitment.” (Dama)

She also revealed that she feels quite motivated despite not being able to speak her mother language at work, but she finds that any job has a purpose, even the fact that one has been hired has a purpose itself.

Edo, despite all the points of view already provided, does retain that there is no purpose in working for a client business for a temporary period. His motivation at work was around 2

or 3 out of 10, while is currently around 8. To the question about the commitment to the goals set by the corporate client, he said:

“Before not at all. I mean at the beginning of the job, yes, but then I started understanding the dynamics of the job and then I got completely uninterested and unwilling to complete my job properly.” (Edo)

In addition, Edo’s overall happiness at work was around 3 before compared to 8 in his current position as direct employee.

Ela experienced the same feeling as Edo in terms of commitment to the client company, as she did not feel committed to it. In addition, she also believes that there is no purpose in working for a business client for a short time, but differently she thinks that it depends on the company. Her motivation at work impacted positively because she could share the workspace with people from other parts of the world and practise several languages, and negatively due to the bad management she experienced. Her happiness is also impacted differently. She feels quite happy because the work itself allows her to help customers and feel useful. However, she does not agree with the company’s policies and would not recommend her kind of work to anyone else in the future.

As Edo and Ela, Ana also considers that working for a limited time for a corporate company has no purpose and her happiness is impacted too. She indicated that she could go to work and complete tasks but would not feel happy. Regarding her commitment to the business client’s goals and her motivation at work, she replied to the questions with the following answers:

“I don’t see a future. So, I cannot be committed in the long run, but I feel committed while I’m there at the moment...I started very motivated at first because I didn’t know about the culture and environment of the company. I also considered a future there, but with time the motivation went down...There is a disconnection, you are not there as an employee. So, that impacts your motivation overall. You feel that you are just there for 8 hours and not contributing to anything. While my motivation could get higher consequently maybe of receiving more money or ways to earn extras. Or just trying to find ways to get employees more involved even if they are outsourced.” (Ana)

On the contrary, for Mary, working for a limited period of time, for a corporate business, has always a purpose despite such a work contract, because a person can always take something from that experience and enrich the cultural background in the kind of job.

Indeed, she feels committed, and tries to improve personally as well and do a better job. That is why her motivation is around 8 on a 1-to-10 scale.

In contrast, Tobias retains that working for a client firm for a short period of time would have a purpose just in the case the worker agreed to a temporary contract. He also added that now at this work, he feels committed to the job, and to the goals set by the company for which he is working, and shares the values of the company, while he was not committed in the previous experience as he did not have any clue about the company's orientation. He just knew that he needed to accomplish his daily tasks. That impacted a lot his motivation that before was barely 1 on a 1-to-10 scale, and now is about 8. The happiness of this worker also got affected, since currently it is 8 and before was close to 3 on the same scale.

In line with Edo, Ela, and Ana, working for a corporate business for a limited period of time has no purpose for Alba. Moreover, even though she has a direct contract with the company, she does not feel committed to it because she does not share the same values and goals, which were made clear to her. She believes that the commitment should be related to motivation and something she trusts on.

4.6 Health and safety conditions

When asked about their work well-being, Barbi immediately mentioned some physical conditions which are at risk due to the type of job. As they spend most of the time sitting, she suggested better work materials that might help accomplish the daily required tasks, for instance professional chairs, higher and more comfortable tables, as well as adopt some practices that might reduce eyes' fatigue due to being in front of the computer for so many hours. However, Barbi found beneficial the fact that the client company organises yearly appointments with a doctor to check the staff's health conditions. Moreover, she suggested the implementation of psychological support, a psychologist that listens to them. In her opinion, this would be good for improving the workers' health. She reported that the job can become stressful and that she already experienced a burnout, and some days she even had work-related panic attacks.

Lewis informed that he needs to commute to reach the workplace, but during the pandemic he was able to work from home and got some relief. However, when it was possible to be back at the workplace, the client company asked for workers to be present and needed to travel again. He found that this had a negative impact on his health conditions. On the contrary, he indicated that at the workplace the work materials such as chairs and computers are quite good for his well-being. Also, he feels safe since they moved the office to a new building.

Masha also agrees as Barbi that the job can get stressful, while some other days are calmer, so she does not feel that the workload is balanced, leading to additional work stress. She already experienced burnout. In terms of health and safety conditions instead, she believes that these conditions are adequate.

Edo differently from Masha indicated that his job could become very stressful and his mental health conditions being impacted consequently, because of both companies' demands. Due to that, he informed that he already experienced burnout. On the contrary, the safety conditions and the health conditions were fine, and still are in his current work.

The interviewee Dama agrees with Masha stating that the health and safety conditions were good in the context of agency work, and she believes that they will be great as well now that she is going to be directly hired.

When discussing the health and safety conditions, Ela informed that she feels physically quite healthy, however, she admitted that her eyes got more stressed. As mentioned by Barbi, there is the need to implement actions to reduce eyes' fatigue when the work requires being in front of information and communication technology devices for a long time. Regarding mental health, she clarified that the fact that she did not match with the client company' policies impacted her a lot. She experienced burnout in that work, and it never happened to her before.

In terms of health and safety conditions, Ana experiences some anxiety which has an impact on her overall well-being. This anxiety is mostly related to the fact that she does not feel that she has the control over business procedures, and this causes a sense of anger

that does not let her feel comfortable. Anyway, she admits that she tends to be like a sponge absorbing everything in the surrounding environment.

Like Ela, Ana also perceives that physically she is fine, but her mental health is impacted. She has not experienced burnout yet, but if the stress and the situation persist, she will get there. She wanted to report an unpleasant situation which occurred at the workplace, and in that moment, she felt like left alone without a safety net behind her. Indeed, she would have liked the client management to act generally differently regarding their workers:

“With the management I feel that they are very passive. They know which things are not going on and they don’t do anything valid. You should show to the people that are working for you that you are there for them as well. The manager always has to lead. I put myself in front of you, to solve your issue and you can count on me’ but that is not happening here. You are left alone.” (Ana)

When Mary talked about her overall well-being, she also mentioned that she feels stressed and with anxiety like Ana explained:

“Well, my well-being has some ups and downs. I mean, sometimes it’s stressful, and I feel overwhelmed. It has an impact on my well-being because I feel more anxious. We are not seen like people. We are seen like robots... And this is bad.” (Mary)

She added that she tries to take some distance from these scenarios and not get too affected just because she knows that the job is temporary, admitting that she would feel more worried about that if it was something to continue happening with long-term work. However, what she thinks that could help improve temporary workers’ conditions, would be the implementation of psychological support as suggested by Barbi:

“They could cooperate and provide some kind of psychologist, a department where you can have meetings where you can express yourself or a person that can collect all these insights from workers and try to communicate what to do to both parties. So, as they can maybe find a solution together. Because I think it’s important to any kind of company or any kind of temporary agency. It’s normal that any company focuses on productivity and because of that the company exists, but it’s also important to focus on the well-being of the employee, because if an employee is feeling good, I believe that will produce more, and will be more motivated, and will be happier and feeling good.” (Mary)

On the other hand, Mary feels protected in terms of safety conditions and now that the team got larger and they have more co-workers helping each other, she feels that the health conditions are getting better.

Tobias agrees with Mary considering that the safety conditions were fine in many of his previous work experiences. However, about health conditions he mentioned:

“At the moment is a good thing because there are days with flexibility and because I have more freedom... There is a good balance between work and health, and I don't have to stay in the same activity or position a lot of time...Previously in the job, I can say that I suffered from burnout, like I felt tired all time and irritated, and could get mad easily.” (Tobias)

For Alba and as both Barbi and Mary indicated, there is the need to develop a sort of mental health plan to support workers, and like Tobias, she also feels safe at the workplace:

“About my mental health I think that sometimes it is disregarded and undervalued. On a mental health basis, the company should take into consideration more activities and actions in order to give a space for the people to understand if they are really good...I think it should be important to implement some environment, some spaces, some entities in the job space where people can really talk. This is because sometimes we just think about reaching the goals, and sometimes you lose yourself a bit in this way. So, I think it's important to make sure that you know what to do and if you have difficulties, you are able to ask for help. I think that people from the client company are not giving importance to it.” (Alba)

Moreover, she highlighted the fact that most of the time she feels as in the middle between client company's requirements and workers' needs, and all this caused her burnout:

“The client requires us to be like a filter which passes all the information, and communication. You are exposed a lot to what the client is asking you but also to what workers need, how they are feeling, if there is a pattern that is affecting all of them. It's like you receive inputs from both sides, from the client and from the team so there are sometimes moments in which you are overwhelmed by both sides, and you just have to continue your work...Yes, I already had burnout at work and because of this I've started a journey with my psychologist.” (Alba)

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Thomson and Hünefeld (2021) concluded that recently many organisations opted for temporary agency work replacing the most common long-term work relationships with agency work agreements. This non-standard work arrangement involves three parties: a worker who has a direct employment relationship and contract with a private employment agency, which is the actual employer; an employment agency that has a direct commercial contract with a client, which is the user company; and the user company that supervises the work performed by the agency worker.

This research questions about the factors that may affect the well-being of temporary agency workers. Therefore, the main objectives concern temporary agency workers and well-being. The focus regarding well-being is developed by analysing its three dimensions, which include the psychological well-being, the social well-being, and the physical well-being, and all the critical aspects that can overall impact it. The in-depth interviews permitted to obtain insights about agency workers' feelings and perspectives and understand how their overall wellbeing is impacted daily at work. This study intends to recognize these impacting critical factors and provide these takeaways to managers both from client companies and work agencies to improve their management of agency workers.

As all the interviewees are currently living and working in Portugal, the analysis is relevant to the Portuguese temporary employment industry. As indicated in chapter 3, this sector has changed in recent years, including now agencies that can employ workers with a contract that is temporary or permanent.

The objective of this study was to look at this new normal and emerging trend and explore its implications, by giving voice to the workers' viewpoint on how this triangular relationship can improve agency workers' overall well-being. Indeed, according to the literature found about this topic, and from the interviewed people, it was possible to realise that there are some factors affecting the agency workers' well-being reflected for instance, in the workers' non-involvement, the sense of work instability and their intention to leave. However, some concerns were raised even regarding the lack of active listening and communication, support not received or provided, lack of commitment to the client company and its goals or established metrics, with an impact on health and safety

conditions. Some interesting findings were related to the perceived differences between direct employees and workers hired by an employment agency, mostly in terms of type of contract, its benefits and drawbacks, and health and safety conditions.

By taking a look at the insights provided by these workers and thinking of their past or present work experiences, it is noticeable that the overall well-being of a person can be impacted by several factors, and especially negatively, if this person is part of this triangular work relationship. By the analysis of these interviews, it was possible to get meaningful details regarding workers' feelings, and the impacts experienced somehow related to this work arrangement. In addition, the acknowledgment of this impact can be useful for managers of both involved companies to improve the management of this type of workers. Consequently, based on the perceived workers' conditions this study can contribute to finding actions that can be applied to mitigate the negative effects of this triangular work agreement. This research wants to contribute to the literature by raising concerns related to agency workers' conditions and providing a better understanding of these issues, and their impact on the overall well-being of these workers. Moreover, this research aims to establish some beneficial actions that could be applied by the management of both companies involved, and contribute to the sustainable Human Resource Management through a better understanding of the impact of human resource practices on the parties involved in this triangular work relationship.

5.1 Limitation of the study

A few limitations should be noted as for instance the limited number of interviews, as with their unique and different experiences. Moreover, the participants' age ranges from 20 to 40 but again maybe the outcomes would be different if people over 40 had also been interviewed. Moreover, most of the people interviewed signed for a permanent contract with the employment agency, and therefore insights are referred to those experiences. Different findings might have been obtained by interviewing people with a short-term contract as agency workers.

In addition to that, another limitation can be related to time constraints as by being a working student, it was complex managing a study-work balance, in terms of being always

focused and attentive, organise the interviews with the workers and explore the already published and available literature about this topic.

5.2 Implications for practice

The findings can be useful for both companies, the client company, and the employment agency. The client company supervises the daily work, at the workplace, to make sure that the expectation about the goals is met and the established metrics are reached. On the other side, the work agency because it is the actual employer and directly hire the agency worker.

Therefore, the worker is managed by both companies, by the work agency due to the nature of the work contract and direct employment, by the client company because of the daily tasks to be accomplished.

Consequently, both companies are responsible for the worker, so they both should implement practices that improve agency workers' conditions. To sum up there is a dual responsibility in the Human Resource Practice system that must be handled by both these companies for the well-being of these workers.

The purpose of this study is also to understand which practices could be beneficial when leading temporary agency workers, and how to develop this dual responsibility in terms of applicable practices. The concept of sustainable human resource management can help reach this aim.

Aust et al. (2019) pointed out that a recent need for companies in general, is to become more sustainable both in terms of goals and design for practices and processes. In the paper of Aust et al. (2019) it is indicated that the HRM practices have indeed an effect not only on workers but also on organisations in regard to human, social, and environmental contexts.

Sustainable Human Resource Management is presented as a strategy defined as “the management of human resources to meet the optimal needs of the company and community of the present without compromising the ability to meet the needs of the future” (Aust et al., 2019, p.4), and the authors divide it into several types. One type is the Socially Responsible HRM, which they inform to be related to the acknowledgement that “corporations are responsible not only for the people they employ directly, but also for the

communities in which they operate and also for those indirectly employed in their supply chains” (Aust et al., 2019, p.4).

As mentioned in the People Management course, at FEP, socially responsible work relations are intended to be the ones that meet the ethical, social, labour, and human concerns of the employees and reduce the sense of instability, lack of protection, social and economic vulnerability, and job uncertainty (Cabral-Cardoso, 2022). This study material divides the socially responsible HRM into four main groups, which are the training and development, the well-being, the rights, and the work-life (Cabral-Cardoso, 2022). The first group focuses on the characteristics of the workers in terms of baggage knowledge and skills, by developing an environment that can stimulate the workers with repeated learning and training sessions, raising the level of their satisfaction both personally and professionally, and the level of their employability (Cabral-Cardoso, 2022). Therefore, the focus is on creating opportunities for workers to become successful. The second group includes health and safety conditions, reducing stress, and therefore, the possibility to experience a burnout, and providing the worker with needed and proper support (Cabral-Cardoso, 2022). The third one refers to practices that want to avoid any sort of discrimination, and instead, encourage a work environment that is more inclusive, where uniqueness and individuality are respected and admired values (Cabral-Cardoso, 2022). This group also includes policies about privacy and right to disconnect in order not to receive work communications and emails after working hours. The fourth and last group instead is about policies and practices that want to contribute to a better work-life balance, as for instance the request for a time off or swaps in work schedules in accordance with private life or family’s needs (Cabral-Cardoso, 2022).

So, both the user company and the employment agency should implement practices to improve agency workers conditions, and they could follow the example of application of a more sustainable HRM, and particularly the development of a socially responsible HRM through the employment of beneficial practices that can be extrapolated from each group division, and customised and applied according to each work reality for the overall well-being of temporary agency workers.

Moreover, the findings available through this research can be seen firstly as a starting point for reflection, and secondly as a starting point for action. Indeed, several critical factors

have been highlighted and presented in diverse sections of analysis, as for instance the lack of proper communication among parties, and needed support, the turnover caused by a sense of not being part of the work context and seen just a resource to be used and exploited to comply with the corporate economic necessities. All this feeling provokes a sense of non-involvement and commitment, and on the other hand increases the level of stress which can lead to physical and mental disorders. In addition to that, the awareness that a direct employment relationship is different from a non-standard relationship, with diverse benefits and drawbacks, underling in a certain sense, differences between workers and employees themselves, considering workers the ones hired by a recruitment agency and employees the ones from a client company. This way the sense of not belonging to the work environment and general purpose of the corporate business increases, leading to perceived inequalities and dehumanisation of the workers who feel as just resources, and not human beings with their distinct characteristics, skills, and knowledge, able to bring added value to the organisations.

5.3 Suggestion for further research

Having explored the factors that may have an impact on overall well-being of agency workers, further research is suggested on the effectiveness of joint managements' strategies that can be beneficial when handling this triangular work agreement. These strategies are meant to improve the overall well-being of these workers, their perception of non-standard arrangements and their implicit assumption that is a detrimental solution, and the relationships created between temporary agency workers and the other involved companies. Furthermore, it would be interesting to explore how beneficial practices applied, for the well-being of agency workers, can have positive impacts not only on the workers but also on the work outcomes which in turn sustain a business.

In addition, some workers mentioned the need to receive support from professionals, for instance psychological support. Therefore, it would be useful in the future to examine the dynamics of this implementation in a company, and what impact it might have on the workers' well-being. Moreover, if some organisations have already adopted this service, it would be interesting to see how the businesses developed afterwards, and if a positive work outcome was obtained as a result of the satisfaction of the workers about this service.

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Appendix

1. How old are you?
2. What is your educational level?
3. What country are you from?
4. Which country are you living and working in?
5. What is your previous experience in the labour market?
6. Which is your job sector?
7. By which company have you been directly hired?
8. For which company are you working?
9. Which is your current role in the client company?
10. How long have you worked in your current company?
11. What made you work for an employment agency, rather than being directly hired by a company? Was it a need or a choice?
12. If you had the choice, would you prefer to have a direct employment relationship?
13. What are the benefits and drawbacks of temporary agency work in your opinion?
14. What are the benefits and drawbacks of direct employment relationships in your opinion?
15. How do you feel about your work environment at the workplace?
16. How would you describe your well-being at work? Could you please provide me with more details?
17. Do you have easy access to all facilities of the client company as any of your colleagues?
18. How have you found the team around you?
19. Do you feel there are any differences among employees directly hired and agency workers?
20. How is your work routine at your workplace?
21. Have you noticed a clear setting of goals from the management of your client company? If yes, how do they work?
22. Is there a reward or a sort of punishment system?
23. Have you noticed some clear actions taken by the client company and agency work management to improve workers and employees' conditions?

24. Which actions should an employment agency take that you see to be more beneficial when leading temporary agency workers?
25. Do you feel that these practices can influence the overall well-being?
26. How would you rate your happiness at work?
27. Do you feel committed to your job and goals set by the client company?
28. How would you rate your motivation at work?
29. Working for a client company for a limited period of time, do you feel your work has a purpose?
30. How do you feel about your working (health and safety) conditions?
31. How stressful is your work? Did you ever experience a burnout for instance?
32. How do you feel about the interactions you have with your agency work? And is there something you would like to improve?
33. How would you describe your work relationships with co-workers and direct managers of the client company?
34. Do you feel that you get enough support when you need it?
35. Do you feel that both companies involved in this work relationship are concerned about worker retention? Do you think that they developed or should develop a retention plan?
36. How would you evaluate a job obtained via a temporary work agency? Do you believe that there is an implicit assumption that it is a bad job? If yes, would you like to provide me with a possible explanation for that?
37. Would you mind reporting any unpleasant situation that occurred at the workplace or due to whether the client company or the agency work?
38. Have you ever worked before with other work agreements?
39. Which differences have you found?
40. Do you have anything to add related to these topics?