

A comparison of the communication behaviors of temporary employees and new hires. (Communication in the Age of the Disposable Worker)

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Most organizational research fails to examine the communication experiences of temporary employees. Based on uncertainty reduction theory and impression management, this study compares the information-seeking and information-giving behaviors of temporary employees and newly hired, regular employees. Results suggest that temporary employees are less concerned about impression management, seek appraisal information less frequently, and practice less information giving than newly hired, regular employees. The data indicate temporary employees are more communicatively isolated from organizational members than other newcomers. Results suggest organizations may improve organizational learning and innovation by increasing communication with temporary employees.

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Most extant research examining communication among organizational members assumes that those members have permanent appointments with the organization. To date, organizational communication research has ignored an important type of organizational member--the temporary worker.

Temporary workers represent a large portion of the U.S. contingency worker population. This contingency population includes freelancers, subcontractors, independent professionals, or contract workers as well as the employees more commonly known as temps (usually hired through a temporary employment agency). The contingency workforce has increased significantly over the past decades. Fierman (1994) stated that by some calculations, one out of four employees is now a member of the contingency workforce--people hired by companies to cope with unexpected or temporary challenges. With contingency workers comprising nearly one quarter of the workforce, the long-standing assumption that employees (and research participants) are regular or permanent members of their organizations is no longer valid.

The rise of temps as a significant portion of the contingency workforce has been particularly dramatic. The number of temporary workers employed in the United States has doubled over the past 5 years to 1.9 million, and with more employers demanding a flexible workforce, that number could easily grow to 3.5 million by the year 2000 ("Temporary Jobs," 1994). According to Fierman (1994), Manpower, Inc., the largest of approximately 7,000 U.S. temporary employment agencies, is now also the nation's largest private employer, with roughly 600,000 people on its payroll. Clearly, temporary workers have become an important force in American business. As Andrews and Herschel (1996) point out, "The notion of a temporary or 'disposable' work force may be the most important trend in business today, and one that is fundamentally changing the relationship between

Americans and their jobs" (p. 338).

Though communication scholars have paid little attention to this important trend, economists and sociologists have devoted attention to identifying who temporary workers are and what jobs they hold (e.g., Howe, 1986), what they earn (Williams, 1989), and why they temp (e.g., Carey & Hazelbaker, 1986; Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993; Polivka & Nardone, 1989). In a recent qualitative study, Rogers (1995) found that temps are often physically and socially isolated from other workers. Her findings suggest that the communication experiences of temporary workers are significantly different from those of regular or permanent employees.

Grounded in uncertainty reduction and impression management theories, this study compares the communication experiences of temporary employees (hired for a limited duration), with new hires (employees newly hired for regular or permanent positions). Although both of these types of employees are newcomers to their organizations, examining the differences in their information-seeking and information-giving behaviors will provide insight into the unique communication experiences of temporary employees. The study also examines the relationships between communication and job satisfaction, role ambiguity, perceived performance, and communication knowledge to explore the impact of the communication experiences on these employees.

Literature Review

A large amount of research regarding information seeking has developed during the past decade. This research is grounded largely in uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), which posits that the more uncertainty individuals face in a situation, the more likely they are to seek information to reduce that uncertainty. New employees face a great deal of uncertainty on entering an organization (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Teboul, 1994). One type of uncertainty newcomers face is behavior-outcome

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uncertainty (Brett, 1984), which refers to uncertainty regarding "what constitutes legitimate behavior and 'good' performance" and is reduced through information acquisition (Miller & Jablin, 1991, p. 95). Employees reduce behavior-outcome uncertainty in part by seeking referent information (i.e., information regarding how to perform tasks effectively) and appraisal information (i.e., feedback regarding whether they have performed their tasks successfully). Theoretically, the higher individuals' levels of behavior-outcome uncertainty, the more likely they are to seek information to reduce the uncertainty. Extant research provides empirical evidence that employees do seek information when faced with uncertainty while assuming new positions (e.g., Kramer, 1993, 1996; Morrison, 1993b; Teboul, 1995).

Although employees were at one time viewed as passive recipients of feedback and information, current scholarship recognizes that employees use two main strategies to actively seek information to reduce uncertainty: direct (e.g., overt questions) and indirect (e.g., observation, surveillance, indirect questions, using third parties as information sources, testing limits, disguising conversations) (Ashford & Cummings, 1985; Miller & Jablin, 1991). An important factor influencing the type of information-seeking strategy used by newcomers is the perceived social cost of using a particular strategy. Grounded in social exchange theory, Miller and Jablin (1991) suggest that

All communication involves costs or social exchange. . . .
Rewards include

the acquisition of resources (e.g., information related to the reduction

of uncertainty) and positive affect such as personal attraction, social

acceptance, social approval, and respect /prestige (Blau, 1964). Costs

are identified as the obverse of social rewards (e.g., social rejection

instead of social approval) and /or the absence of rewards. (p. 95)

Similarly, Morrison and Bies (1991) point out the importance of impression management in considering seeking feedback or information. Consistent with the social cost concept put forth by Miller and Jablin (1991) and Ashford and Cummings (1985), if individuals perceive that seeking information may damage their public image (e.g.,

such behavior may make the individual appear insecure or incompetent), they will be less inclined to actively seek that information. Morrison and Bies point out, however, that "concerns about one's public image are not always salient to the feedback seeker" (p. 532). A variety of factors influence the salience of such concerns, including the individual's dependency on the source of the feedback, the likelihood that the individual will be formally evaluated in the near future, and the individual's recent performance. As Morrison and Bies note, "The greater the feedback seeker's dependency on the source for future evaluations, rewards and sanctions, the more salient impression management should be" (p. 533). The authors provide support for this assertion with findings from extant research that people are much less concerned about how they appear to people with whom they are unlikely to interact in the future and with whom there is a lack of interdependency.

These arguments indicate that impression management may be a minimal concern for temporary employees compared to newly hired, regular employees. Temporary employees are less likely than new hires to be formally evaluated by employees at their temporary assignments. Once their assignments end, temps typically receive a paycheck from the temporary agency, not from the organization for which they worked. Formal evaluations are rarely provided. Conversely, most organizations perform formal evaluations of permanent employees on an annual basis. Because new hires typically hope to experience a long tenure in the organization, they are more likely to perceive that they are dependent on their coworkers (either peers, subordinates, or supervisors) for rewards and sanctions, perceive an interdependent relationship with their coworkers, and perceive they will interact with their coworkers in the future than are temporary employees. Temporary employees, on the other hand, know they will be leaving the organization in a very short period of time and are therefore less likely to interact with other organizational members in the future and less likely to perceive an interdependent relationship with their coworkers. Accordingly, impression management is likely to be a greater concern for permanent employees than for temporary employees.

Taken together, the literature reviewed above indicates that temporary employees will be less concerned with managing their public image in the workplace than will new hires. This concern will lead new hires to perceive greater social costs associated with seeking referent and appraisal information than will temporary employees, which suggests the following:

Hypothesis 1: Temporary employees will perceive lower

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social costs

associated with seeking referent and appraisal information than will

newly hired, regular employees.

Miller and Jablin (1991) suggest the higher the perceived social costs of seeking information, the more likely an individual will be to use indirect (e.g., monitoring) rather than direct (e.g., direct solicitation of information) information-seeking strategies. In a study of helicopter pilot trainees, Fedor, Rensvold, and Adams (1992) found the perceived cost of seeking appraisal information was a strong negative predictor of an individual's reported direct feedback-seeking behavior. Similarly, Morrison and Bies (1991) argue that individuals concerned with managing their public image are less likely to ask for feedback directly. Along these lines, Teboul (1995) showed empirically that perceived social costs were negatively associated with overt information-seeking strategies for newcomers faced with uncertainty. The more limited image management concerns of temporary employees suggest the following:

Hypothesis 2: Temporary employees will report directly soliciting

referent and appraisal information more frequently than newly hired,

regular employees.

As an alternative to the high social cost of directly requesting information, employees may actively monitor or observe to gain information and feedback (Ashford, 1986). Though both temporary employees and new hires can use this strategy, temporary employees are less likely to be motivated to actively monitor for information than regular employees. Performance evaluations are of limited value to temporary employees but are critical for regular employees to assess their organizational success. Morrison (1993b, 1995) found that newcomers were particularly likely to use monitoring to gain appraisal information and feedback. Thus, compared to temporary employees, new hires (who are likely to perceive greater social costs associated with directly seeking referent and appraisal information and are more motivated to seek information) may rely heavily on indirect strategies to gain information. This suggests the third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Temporary employees will report using the indirect

information-seeking strategy of monitoring for referent and appraisal

information less frequently than newly hired, regular employees.

In addition to inquiry and monitoring, employees receive unsolicited information from their coworkers and supervisors. This passive approach to gaining information has been noted as significant in the adjustment of employees (Kramer, Callister, & Turban, 1995; Morrison, 1993a). On one hand, other employees may assume temporary employees are less knowledgeable in their jobs and therefore provide extra unsolicited information to help the temporary employees quickly learn their jobs. On the other hand, other employees may assume that because the temporary employee will be gone shortly, providing them with unsolicited information is unnecessary. These competing explanations suggest the following question:

Research Question 1: Do temporary employees and newly hired, regular

employees differ in the amount of unsolicited information they report

receiving?

Information giving is also an important part of the organizational entry period for new employees.

Information-giving refers to the extent to which members provide information to others regarding how to do a task or how to organize work procedures and the extent to which members provide input into workplace decisions.

Information giving is important for a variety of reasons. Employee information giving is a necessary input for organizational innovation and learning (e.g., Nonaka, 1994). Information giving also provides an opportunity for impression management by appearing competent and confident. Kramer et al. (1995) suggest three additional advantages for individuals providing information to others in the workplace. First, giving information enables employees to "individualize or change the organization to meet their personal needs" (p. 156). Thus, employees who give information are able to change the work environment to better suit their own needs and work habits. Second, giving information also enables employees to reduce uncertainty about workplace norms and roles because coworkers are likely to reciprocate by providing information in return. Finally, information giving plays an important role in relationship development. As Kramer et al. (1995) state, "Relationships are established through a social exchange process in which information is given and taken from self

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and others" (p. 156). By giving information, an employee may demonstrate competence to peers and supervisors, thus increasing their status in the organization.

Taken together, the above suggests that temporary employees may be less likely to give information than new hires. As mentioned previously, temps are less likely than regular employees to be concerned with their image and thus are less likely to provide information in pursuit of impression management goals. Rogers (1995) found that temporary workers lack connection to their jobs (i.e., they are provided little instruction regarding how to do their job and the purpose of their task). Given this lack of connection, temps have little motivation to individualize or personalize their roles. Temps also lack connection to their coworkers due to physical and social isolation. Such isolation results largely from the transitory nature of temporary work, and little effort is expended in relational development (Rogers, 1995). Accordingly, temporary workers should be less motivated to give information in pursuit of relational development. This suggests the next hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Temporary employees will report less information giving

than will newly hired, regular employees.

The use of particular information-seeking strategies is likely to affect a variety of outcome variables. Miller and Jablin (1991) point out that one of the disadvantages of indirect strategies of information seeking is the increased likelihood of obtaining inaccurate information or not obtaining the desired information at all. Use of direct strategies is more likely to result in accurate uncertainty reduction. Accordingly, employees who obtain referent and appraisal information through direct means should experience less uncertainty or ambiguity regarding their role in the organization and less ambiguity regarding the communication rules and norms of the workplace (i.e., communication knowledge). Because temporary employees are expected to use direct requests more frequently (Hypothesis 2), the following is suggested:

Hypothesis 5: Temporary employees will report less role ambiguity and

higher levels of communication knowledge than will newly hired, regular

employees.

Role ambiguity and lack of communication knowledge are negatively related to job satisfaction (e.g., Ashforth &

Saks, 1996). In addition, a high level of role ambiguity and a low level of communication knowledge are likely to impair an employee's performance on the job (e.g., they are uncertain of their role, what is expected of them, and how to communicate to obtain such information).

Moreover, extant research indicates that reliance on observation (monitoring) to obtain job-related information (an indirect strategy) is related to increased stress (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). The hypothesized reliance of new hires on indirect information-seeking strategies suggests the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6: Temporary employees will report higher levels of perceived

performance and job satisfaction than will newly hired, regular

employees.

According to Polivka and Nardone (1989), people perform temporary work instead of seeking regular employment for three main reasons: (a) Some temp because they enjoy the flexibility of the work that allows them to pick and choose their hours, vacation times, and so forth; (b) some temp to explore career options in a particular industry or business; and (c) others take temporary positions in particular organizations with the hope that they will be hired on a permanent basis. Individuals' motivation to temp is likely to affect their information-seeking and information-giving behaviors on the job. In particular, temps who hope to eventually be hired permanently are likely to see themselves as dependent on supervisors and coworkers for future rewards (i.e., a permanent job) and to be motivated to seek feedback to discover their supervisor's goals, expectations, and ongoing evaluation of them (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). Seeking feedback should result in positive changes in how they are rated by others (Edwards, 1995). In this regard, their behavior should closely resemble that of newly hired, regular employees. They should perceive greater social costs associated with seeking information and, consequently, should rely on indirect information-seeking strategies more and provide information more frequently to make a positive impression than temporary workers for whom seeking permanent employment is not a motive for temping. Similarly, by relying on indirect strategies, these temporary employees should also perceive greater role ambiguity, less communication knowledge, lower perceived performance, and lower job satisfaction than individuals who do not desire a permanent position. This suggests the final hypothesis:

Hypothesis 7: The more individuals are motivated to take a

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temporary

temporary assignment.

position to eventually obtain permanent employment with the organization

Measures

and the greater the perceived social costs associated with seeking

Information seeking. Information seeking was measured using items tapping two types of information (referent and appraisal; e.g., Miller & Jablin, 1991) and three information-seeking methods (soliciting information, monitoring, and receiving unsolicited information; e.g., Kramer et al., 1995). Participants were asked how frequently they used each strategy with their peers and supervisor and responded using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = never to 5 = very often). Alpha reliabilities for the scales ranged from .83 to .98.

referent and appraisal information, the more likely they are to use

indirect information-seeking strategies, the more likely they are to give

Information giving. Information giving was measured using items tapping three information-giving methods: answering information requests, modeling behavior, and providing unsolicited information (Kramer et al., 1995). There were three items per scale. Again, the participants reported the frequency with which they used each method with their supervisor and peers, using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = never to 5 = very often). Alpha reliabilities for the scales ranged from .86 to .97.(3)

information, the higher their perceived role ambiguity, and the lower

their communication knowledge, perceived performance, and job

satisfaction.

Method

Sample

Data were obtained from 78 employees who were either new hires or temporary employees. Specifically, questionnaires were distributed to 62 new hires in a large research and development organization in the Northwest and 30 new hires in a similar organization in the Midwest. Of the new hires surveyed, 36 returned completed questionnaires (39% response rate). Questionnaires were also distributed to 52 temporary employees in the Northwest and 20 temporary employees in the Midwest. Of the temporary employees, 42 provided completed questionnaires (58% response rate).(2)

Perceived social costs. Perceived social costs were measured using a modified version of Fedor et al.'s (1992) Social Costs Scale. Three items concerned the perceived social costs of seeking appraisal information, and three items concerned the perceived social costs of seeking referent information. Participants rated the perceived social costs of seeking both types of information from their peers and their supervisors on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The alpha reliability coefficient for the perceived costs of seeking appraisal information was .83, and seeking referent information was .87.

Of the new hires, 56% (20) were female. The average age of the new hires was 31 years (range = 18-60, SD = 10.76). At the time they completed their questionnaires, the new hires had been employed in their current positions for an average of 127 days (range = 7-365 days, SD = 83). Of the new hires, 53% held industrial labor positions, whereas 47% performed clerical work. Of the temporary employees, 50% (21) were female. The average age of the temporary employees was 30 years (range = 18-55, SD = 9.65). The average length of their most recent temporary assignment was 34 days (range = 1-120, SD = 36.36). Of the temporary employees, 48% performed industrial labor in their most recent temporary assignment and 52% held clerical positions. Only four of the temporary employees reported that they had previously temped at the organization where they completed their most recent

Outcome variables. Role ambiguity (the extent to which individuals do not have a clear understanding of the requirements of their role) was measured using Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman's (1970) six-item instrument ($\alpha = .87$). Perceived performance (how well employees perceived they had mastered and performed their job) was measured using Chao, Walz, and Gardner's (1992) five-item instrument ($[\text{Alpha}] = .83$). Communication knowledge (how well employees perceived they understood the communication rules and norms of the organizations) was measured using Kramer's (1993) four-item instrument ($[\text{Alpha}] = .68$). Overall job satisfaction was measured using Hackman and Oldham's (1975) three-item scale ($[\text{Alpha}] = .81$).

Motivation for temporary employment. Temporary

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employees were asked to rate three major motives (Polivka & Nardone, 1989) for taking their most recent temporary assignment using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = not a motive to 5 = strong motive). The motives were "I enjoy the flexibility of temporary work," "I hope to eventually obtain a permanent position at that organization," and "I wanted to know what that kind of job/industry is like." An "other" category was also provided; however, because only one respondent used the "other" category, this item was not used in further analyses.

Results

Table 1 provides a correlation matrix for the dependent variables examined. A series of one-tailed t tests for mean differences between temporary employees and new hires were computed to test Hypotheses 1 through 6 and a two-tailed t test was used to examine Research Question 1. A comparison of the means, standard deviations, and range of scores of temporary employees and new hires on the dependent variables is provided in Table 2.

[TABULAR DATA 1-2 NOT REPRODUCIBLE IN ASCII]

Hypothesis 1: Perceived social costs. Results indicate partial support for Hypothesis 1. Specifically, temporary employees and new hires differed significantly with respect to the perceived social costs of seeking appraisal information, $t(76) = -6.53$, p [is less than] .001, [R.sup.2] = .36. As expected, temporary employees perceived lower social costs than did new hires. However, results showed no difference for temporary employees and new hires with respect to the perceived social costs of seeking referent information, $t(75) = -.17$, p [is less than] .42, [R.sup.2] = .00.

Hypothesis 2. Soliciting information. Hypothesis 2 predicted that temporary employees would report directly soliciting referent and appraisal information more frequently than would permanent employees. This hypothesis was not supported for referent information, $t(73) = -1.30$, p [is less than] .09, [R.sup.2] = .02. The t test revealed a significant difference between temporary employees and new hires with respect to soliciting appraisal information, $t(76) = -1.67$, p [is less than] .05, [R.sup.2] = .04, but in a direction opposite to that predicted; temporary employees reported directly soliciting appraisal information less, not more, frequently than did new hires.

Hypothesis 3: Monitoring for information. Results indicate support for Hypothesis 3. As predicted, temporary employees reported monitoring to obtain referent information, $t(73) = -1.70$, p [is less than] .05, [R.sup.2] =

.04, and appraisal information, $t(75) = -2.17$, p [is less than] .02, [R.sup.2] = .06, less frequently than did new hires.

Research Question 1: Receiving unsolicited information. The two types of employees did not significantly differ in the reported frequency with which they received unsolicited appraisal information, $t(75) = .13$, p [is less than] .90, [R.sup.2] = .00, or unsolicited referent information, $t(76) = -.45$, p [is less than] .66, [R.sup.2] = .001.

Hypothesis 4: Information giving. Hypothesis 4 predicted temporary employees would report providing information to others less frequently than would new hires. Results support this hypothesis for all three types of information giving. Temporary employees reported that they answered information requests less frequently than did new hires, $t(72) = 3.78$, p [is less than] .001, [R.sup.2] = .16. In addition, temps reported that they modeled behavior less frequently, $t(74) = -1.87$, p [is less than] .04, [R.sup.2] = .05, and provided unsolicited information less frequently, $t(72) = -3.58$, p [is less than] .001, [R.sup.2] = .15, than did new hires.

Hypothesis 5. Ambiguity and communication knowledge. Hypothesis 5, which predicted temporary employees would report lower levels of role ambiguity and higher levels of communication knowledge than would new him, was not supported. No differences were identified between temps and new hires with respect to role ambiguity, $t(76) = -1.38$, p [is less than] .08, [R.sup.2] = .03, and perceived communication knowledge, $t(73) = .04$, p [is less than] .48, [R.sup.2] = .00.

Hypothesis 6. Job satisfaction and performance. Results provide support for Hypothesis 6. Temporary employees reported significantly higher levels of job satisfaction, $t(76) = 1.75$, p [is less than] .04, [R.sup.2] = .04, and perceived performance, $t(75) = 3.77$, p [is less than] .001, [R.sup.2] = .16, than did new hires.

Hypothesis 7: Impact of seeking permanent employment. To test Hypothesis 7, correlations were computed between temporary employees' motivation to obtain permanent employment and the various information-seeking and information-giving strategies, social costs, role ambiguity, communication knowledge, perceived performance, and job satisfaction scores for the temporary employees. Only two correlations were significant. The stronger the motive for permanent employment, the less frequently did temporary employees receive unsolicited referent information ($n = 42$, $r = -.33$, p [is less than] .05) and the less frequently did they use monitoring to obtain appraisal information ($n = 42$, $r = -.34$, p [is less than] .05).

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Motivation to obtain permanent employment was unrelated to all other dependent variables.

Discussion

Results of the present study provide interesting insights into the communication behaviors of members of the so-called disposable workforce. In particular, the results indicate these temporary employees differed from newly hired, regular employees in several important ways concerning the social costs, communication, and outcome variables examined in the study. These differences occurred even though there were no significant differences between the temporary employees and the newly hired employees in terms of their occupation, gender, and age. Although they differed in terms of organizational tenure and membership, a series of tests indicated that these were not significant confounds.(4)

As predicted, temporary employees perceived significantly fewer social costs associated with seeking information regarding their performance than did new hires. In fact, employment status accounted for approximately 36% of the variance in the appraisal social cost scores. Accordingly, temporary employees appear to enter organizations with significantly different perceptions regarding socially appropriate communication behavior than other new hires.

Contrary to predictions, temporary employees reported directly soliciting appraisal information less frequently than new hires, despite the lower perceived social costs. This finding has important implications for the impression management and information-seeking literature. In particular, the result points to the potential importance of motivation to seek information as moderating the relationship between social costs and actual information-seeking behavior. Specifically, it is possible that temporary employees not only perceive fewer social costs associated with seeking appraisal information but they also perceive such information to be relatively unimportant because it provides fewer benefits. That is, because they intend to work in the organization for a brief period of time and are not likely to be formally evaluated by organizational members, they are not particularly concerned with their coworkers' perceptions of their performance. Temps, therefore, may be less motivated to seek such information through either direct or indirect means. For new hires, any uncertainty about performance evaluation would be more likely to motivate information seeking. Consistent with this explanation, t-test results indicate new hires were also more likely than temps to monitor appraisal information, suggesting a greater concern with obtaining such information. Taken together,

the findings suggest that compared with new hires, temporary employees are relatively less concerned with how others in the workplace perceive their performance and, consequently, exert little effort in obtaining such information. These findings suggest that employee motivation to seek information may be significantly lower for contingency workers and therefore should be of concern as we enter the age of the disposable worker. Organizations may need to make a more concerted effort to communicate to their employees if they lack motivation to seek it on their own. Clearly, motivation to seek information is an important area for future research.

Contrary to predictions, temporary employees and new hires did not differ with respect to the perceived social costs associated with seeking referent information. Both reported fairly low levels of social costs for seeking referent information, indicating the perception that uncertainty regarding how to perform a task is acceptable when an employee (either temporary or newly hired, regular employee) is a newcomer. The means reported in Table 2 indicate that both temporary employees and new hires solicited referent information relatively frequently. Results of the t tests indicate, however, that although temporary employees and new hires perceived similar levels of social costs, associated with seeking referent information, temporary employees monitored such information less frequently than did new hires. This again suggests new hires may be more motivated to obtain information regarding how to perform a task and that organizations must make a greater effort to provide information to their contingency workers. Taken together, however, the data indicate the perception of a grace or honeymoon period expected by new temporary and regular employees with respect to learning how to perform tasks.

The data indicate that temporary employees were asked for information less frequently, provided unsolicited information less frequently, and modeled behavior less frequently than new hires. This finding is consistent with other research indicating that temporary employees tend to be physically and communicatively isolated from permanent employees in the workplace (e.g., Rogers, 1995). As Rogers (1995) points out, temps tend to become invisible organizational members.

Organizations may not see this isolation as a problem because the temps leave the organization in a short time period, but this lack of information giving by temps may have important implications for organizational innovation and knowledge creation. Nonaka (1994) argues that organizational innovation is dependent on the organization's ability to create information and knowledge.

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According to Nonaka, the creation (and recreation) of organizational knowledge is dependent on gaining new information. Nonaka further points out that "the prime movers in the process of organizational knowledge creation are the individual members of an organization" (p. 17). That is, for organizations to create knowledge, individuals must share information. One important factor that enhances the quality of an individual's information is the variety of that individual's experience (Nonaka, 1994, p. 21).

Although temporary workers are not typically viewed as important contributors to organizational innovation, they may actually have much to contribute to organizational knowledge and innovation. Because temporary employees work in an assortment of organizations, they are likely to obtain information regarding a variety of tasks and multiple ways of performing those tasks. As a result of this experiential variety, temporary employees may actually possess high quality or new information that could contribute to an organization a information and knowledge creation. Accordingly, by communicatively isolating their temporary employees, Organizations may be overlooking an important source of information that could enhance the organization's innovative ability. The current assumption that temps cannot contribute to organizational innovation may be invalid. Along these lines, there is some evidence to suggest temps do possess high quality information and skills. Belous (1989) reports that temporary agencies have become a key source of employee training in the American workforce. Similarly, Nye (1988) reports that human resource managers often find that "temps come to the job better qualified than applicants who may show up at the company's own personnel office" (p. 38). Clearly, an important area for future research is examining the extent to which temps actually do possess high quality information and their ability to contribute to organizational innovation.

Again, these findings point to an issue of concern as we enter the age of the disposable worker. If organizations are populated by significantly larger proportions of disposable or contingency workers and information is not sought from these workers (perhaps because of the assumption noted above), organizational knowledge and innovation may decrease. Organizations should be cognizant of this possibility as they continue to employ increasing numbers of contingency workers.

To this end, researchers should examine the reasons information from temporary employees is not sought by organizational members nor volunteered by temporary employees. It may be that, as mentioned above, temporary workers are perceived as being generally unskilled and

accordingly unlikely to possess useful information for the organization. At the same time, temporary workers may perceive little incentive to provide information to organizational members and are therefore less likely to volunteer such information on their own. Thus, just as employees may differ in their motivation to seek information, employees may also differ in their motivation to give information. This is another important area for future research.

Temporary employees reported significantly higher levels of perceived performance than did new hires. Not surprisingly, temporary employees also reported greater job satisfaction than did new hires. It seems unlikely that these results can be explained as resulting from differences in job complexity because temps and new hires were involved in the same job categories.(5) However, because of their greater variety of experience, temporary employees may have developed a larger behavioral repertoire for accomplishing tasks and thus perceive they are able to perform their tasks more proficiently. This is similar to the systems notion that adaptability is enhanced by equifinality (a variety of ways to accomplish a particular task) (Katz & Kahn, 1978). New hires with less experiential variety, on the other hand, may have a more limited skill repertoire and may have greater difficulty adapting to various situational contingencies, leading them to perceive lower performance levels and lower job satisfaction. Future research that focuses on identifying the various skill repertoires of contingency workers and regular hires would provide important insights into the findings reported here.

Results of the present study are consistent with extant research that indicates temporary employees tend to be communicatively isolated from other organizational members (e.g., Rogers, 1995). With the exception of receiving unsolicited appraisal information, temporary employees reported lower mean scores than permanent employees on all of the information-seeking and information-giving measures. However, the present data suggest that temporary employment is not always the unhappy experience portrayed by prior research. This literature typically portrays contingent employment as a business strategy that enhances corporate profits while exploiting and oppressing individual workers. Temps are typically portrayed as isolated, lonely, and unhappy. After investigating the question "What are the human costs of flexibility and who bears these costs?" Rogers (1995) concludes, "Unfortunately, the answer is that the temporary worker bears the costs in the form of alienation from work, alienation from others, and alienation from self" (p. 163). The present data, however, indicate that temporary employees reported higher levels of perceived

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performance and higher levels of job satisfaction than did permanent hires. The temporary employees in this study reported somewhat higher levels of adjustment to their work than the newly hired, regular employees.

A plausible explanation for these findings is that individuals' reason for performing temporary work may influence their perceptions. Along these lines, post hoc correlations in the present study computed between motivation to temp (i.e., desire for flexibility, to obtain information regarding the occupation, and to obtain permanent employment in the organization) and job satisfaction indicated a significant positive correlation between desire for flexibility and job satisfaction ($r = .35$, p [is less than] $.03$). The more individuals were motivated to take a temporary position because they wanted a flexible work schedule, the more satisfied they were with their most recent temporary assignment. On the other hand, motivation to temp to eventually obtain a permanent position in the organization showed a nonsignificant (but negative) relationship with job satisfaction ($r = -.12$, p [is less than] $.45$). Finally, temping to obtain information about the occupation and industry also showed a negative relationship with job satisfaction that approached significance ($r = -.26$, p [is less than] $.09$) despite the small sample size for this analysis ($n = 42$). Taken together, these results indicate that individuals' motivation to perform temporary work may influence their affective response to their work.

This suggests that the alienation temps sometimes experience on their temporary assignments may not be caused exclusively by the organization and its regular members--the temps themselves may contribute to that isolation. People who temp because they want flexibility, for example, may have little interest in forming relationships and communicating with others in the workplace. Being left alone (as the present data and extant research indicate is a typical situation for temps) may actually be desirable for these workers. Those who temp to explore employment opportunities, on the other hand, may be frustrated by the lack of communication they experience with other organizational members (e.g., this isolation subverts their information-gathering goal) and are consequently less satisfied with the experience. An important area for future research, therefore, is examination of the coconstruction of the communicative isolation of temporary workers and the role of motivation to perform temporary work as a component of that process.

Surprisingly, the data indicate that temporary employees with a strong motivation to temp to eventually obtain a permanent position in the organization did not report experiences similar to new hires. Contrary to predictions,

motivation to obtain permanent employment was unrelated to most of the dependent measures. Ashford and Tsui (1991) offer two plausible explanations for these results: (a) Supportiveness and accessibility of supervisors and coworkers influence feedback-seeking behaviors and (b) both parties in the relationship must perceive value or interdependence in the exchange for it to affect the frequency of communication. Because results indicate that temps are relatively isolated communicatively, the opportunity for seeking feedback may simply be limited, even for those seeking full-time employment. Furthermore, coworkers may either not value the exchange because they perceive it as inappropriate to encourage a temp who may have limited opportunity for permanent employment or may perceive an increase in temporary employees in the organization as a threat to their own job security. Further research is needed to examine what impact motivation in taking temporary work has on the experiences of these temporary employees.

Although the primary goal of this study was to identify communication behaviors unique to temporary (disposable) workers, the results have a number of theoretical implications that should be noted. The delineation of different communication behaviors in soliciting referent information versus appraisal information seems to have important implications for uncertainty reduction theory. Both temps and new hires were more willing to request referent information than appraisal information. Research both supporting and criticizing uncertainty reduction theory has generally treated information-seeking generically rather than specifically. It may take significantly greater amounts of uncertainty to motivate information seeking about certain types of information (e.g., evaluative, relational), whereas low levels of uncertainty may sufficiently motivate information seeking for other types of information (e.g., task identification, procedures). Also, as noted elsewhere (Kramer, 1996), uncertainty may motivate indirect methods of information seeking such as observing or monitoring rather than direct requests (as it did for new hires). Differentiating types of information and methods of information seeking may help to clarify the relationship between uncertainty and information seeking.

Results are generally supportive of the impression management literature. As expected, temporary employees who feel less dependent on coworkers and supervisors and who do not anticipate long-term relations with them perceived significantly lower social costs in requesting appraisal information than new hires. The lack of concern for impression management may also explain why they reported significantly less information giving. By providing suggestions and modeling appropriate

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behaviors, new hires may be able to manage or improve their image in the eyes of their peers and supervisors, which may hold long-term advantages for them.

Temporary employees, however, who have no real incentive to improve their image because they do not expect a long-term relationship, were less likely to give information.

Future research should examine ways in which perceived social costs can be reduced for those employees who need to feel comfortable requesting information. For example, receiving unsolicited referent information was negatively related to perceived social costs of requesting appraisal information ($r = -.27$, p [is less than] .05). This suggests that by providing new and temporary employees with unsolicited information, instead of waiting for their requests, the perceived costs of requesting information decrease. This could benefit the employee and the organization by creating more information flow in which temps and new hires feel more comfortable requesting information from established employees.

In addition, these results provide interesting implications for the information-seeking literature--which posits that direct forms of information seeking (i.e., soliciting information) are associated with positive job outcomes, such as lower role ambiguity, higher job satisfaction, and higher perceived performance--whereas indirect (i.e., monitoring) are associated with negative outcomes. The correlations reported in Table 1 indicate that neither direct nor indirect forms of information seeking were significantly associated with the various outcomes measured.

However, receiving unsolicited information was significantly correlated with lower role ambiguity, higher job satisfaction, and higher perceived performance. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating receipt of unsolicited information had a larger impact on these job outcomes than did monitoring or direct solicitation (e.g., Kramer et al., 1995; Morrison, 1993b). Taken together, these results indicate that providing newcomers (either permanent or contingent) with unsolicited information may not only reduce the perceived social costs of seeking information but also may lead to more positive job outcomes.

Limitations

A limitation of the present study was the relatively small sample, which reduced the power of the statistical analyses and generalizability of the findings. The fact that many of the hypotheses were supported despite the small sample size, however, enhances confidence in the findings. Future research should examine these issues with larger samples to confirm, refine, or refute the findings

reported here.

The data obtained in this study were limited to self-reports of communication behavior, not actual observation of those behaviors. Accordingly, the self-report and memory biases inherent in all studies using self-report data are applicable here (e.g., Ringer & Pearson, 1991). Observing the actual communicative behavior of temporary employees and new hires may be a profitable area for future research.

Conclusion

It is expected that the use of temporary workers will continue to increase ("Temporary Jobs," 1994). Results here suggest that the communication experiences of temps are significantly different from those of other new employees. Organizations may miss an opportunity to gain new information and innovations if they continue to isolate and ignore temps. If regular employees communicated with temps more like newly hired regular employees instead of treating temps as if they are not valued because they are disposable workers, a number of positive outcomes might be obtained, including gaining more information. Perhaps through awareness and training, peers and supervisors can learn to change their communication habits with temps and tap into their valuable information and experiences. At the same time, organizations probably need to develop creative incentive systems to motivate temporary employees to become active communicators in the organization.

Notes

(1.) We would like to thank the editors and the two anonymous reviewers for their positive comments and suggestions during the review process. In addition, we want to thank Diane Hirson for her assistance in distributing questionnaires.

(2.) Questionnaires were distributed to permanent employees through intraorganizational mail. The permanent employees were asked to complete the questionnaire and mail it back to the researchers in self-addressed, stamped envelopes provided to them. Follow-up letters (including another copy of the questionnaire and another addressed, stamped envelope) were sent to permanent employees to increase the response rate. Questionnaires were distributed to temporary employees by the researchers directly. Specifically, in the Western location, the researcher went to the temporary agencies that placed the temporary employees on several consecutive Friday afternoons. As the temporary employees arrived to pick up their weekly

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paychecks at the employment agency on Friday afternoon, the researcher asked them to complete questionnaires in a small, private room at the agency or to do so at a later date and return them to the researcher in stamped, addressed envelopes provided to them. In the Midwest, the researcher was able to deliver the questionnaires personally to the temps at their temporary positions and ask them to return the questionnaires via stamped, addressed envelopes. This personal contact in the procedures likely accounts for the larger response rate from temporary employees.

(3.) Although the use of established scales in this study suggested the independence of the various dependent variables, we wanted to establish their independence empirically. Because of the small sample size, a confirmatory factor analysis of the various scales was not feasible. Accordingly, we carried out a series of factor analyses (using a varimax rotation) combining pairs of scales (e.g., a factor analysis of the Monitoring for Referent and Monitoring for Appraisal information-seeking scales, a factor analysis of the Monitoring Appraisal and Soliciting Appraisal information-seeking scales, and so on). Results of these factor analyses generally supported the expected distinctions between the various scales; however, there was some overlap that generally reflects the interscale correlations noted in the correlation matrix (see Table 1). Specifically, there was some overlap of the information-seeking items for receipt of unsolicited referent information and receipt of unsolicited appraisal information and for monitoring for referent information and monitoring for appraisal information. With respect to information giving, some providing unsolicited information items loaded with items tapping the modeling behavior and answering information requests items. These results indicate that although the scales generally reflect distinct constructs, there was some overlap among items in the minds of the respondents.

(4.) The temporary and regular employee samples did not differ significantly with respect to occupation, gender, and age. Not surprisingly, however, the samples differed significantly with respect to tenure on the job, $t(76) = -6.49$, p [is less than] .001, that is, temporary employees reported shorter tenure at their most recent temporary position than regular employees (mean = 34 days and 127 days, respectively). We examined the potential confounding influence of tenure on the results reported in Table 2 in two ways. First, we examined the importance of tenure within samples limited to regular or temporary employees. Within-sample regression results indicated that in no case did tenure have a significant (at the 5% level or better) influence on the dependent variables. This indicates that tenure did not significantly affect reported behavior within

each employment status group. Second, we examined the impact of employment status on the dependent variables using subsamples of regular and temporary employees that were approximately equivalent with respect to tenure. Specifically, the temp subsample ($n = 21$) had a mean tenure of 60 days (range = 21-120, $SD = 33.42$) and the new hire subsample ($n = 20$) had a mean tenure of 62 days (range = 7-120, $SD = 35.76$). Results of a series of one-tailed t tests of mean differences on the various dependent variables between new hires and temporary employees mirrored the results reported using the complete samples with three exceptions-with the subsamples, new hires and temporary employees no longer differed significantly with respect to monitoring for appraisal information (temp mean = 2.99, new hire mean = 3.48, $t = -1.31$, $p = .10$), monitoring for referent information (temp mean = 2.60, new hire mean = 3.12, $t = -1.52$, $p = .07$), and modeling behavior (temp mean = 2.50, new hire mean = 2.88, $t = -1.16$, $p = .12$). It should be noted, however, that the mean scores are in the predicted directions and similar to those obtained with the larger sample. Furthermore, by reducing the sample by nearly one half, significant power was lost and an increased possibility of Type II error exists. Based on both sets of analyses, we conclude that tenure was not a significant confound in this study.

In addition, the influence of organization as a confounding variable was examined. Because the temporary employees worked in several different organizations, we analyzed the effect of organization using only the new hire sample. Because data from new hires were obtained from only two organizations, we conducted a series of two-tailed t tests for mean differences on the dependent variables between organizations. Results of these tests indicated no significant differences between the two organization samples on any of the dependent variables. Accordingly, organization type did not appear to influence the findings reported in Table 2.

(5.) Still, the possibility exists that task may influence the dependent variables. To examine this possibility, a series of t tests were computed examining the difference in means on the dependent variables between employees (both new hires and temps) performing industrial labor ($n = 37$) and those performing clerical/office work ($n = 37$). Results of the two-tailed t tests revealed no significant differences between industrial labor and clerical workers for all but three of the dependent variables. Specifically, the workers differed with respect to the social costs associated with seeking referent information (industrial labor mean = 2.06, clerical mean = 1.64, $t = 2.50$, $p = .02$), modeling behavior (industrial labor mean = 3.07, clerical mean = 2.54, $t = 2.34$, $p = .02$) and monitoring for referent

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information (industrial labor mean = 3.33, clerical mean = 2.81, $t = 2.01$, $p = .05$). Thus, most of the significant results in the study did not differ according to job classification. Accordingly, we conclude that the results reported in Table 2 were not significantly influenced by task type.

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