

AGENCY WORKERS IN BURUNDI; “OUTSIDERS” OR “INSIDERS”?

LINK BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL INCLUSION PERCEPTION AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Stève Cédric Bizimana

Université du Lac Tanganyika, Bujumbura, Burundi.

Abstract

This study examines the perception of inclusion of temporary agency workers in the client organization where they are assigned. It seeks to verify the influence of certain aspects characterizing the relationship between these workers and the client organization on their perception of organizational inclusion and the influence of the latter on their degree of investment in the organization. Based on a quantitative data collection methodology and a binary logistic regression data analysis, findings reveal that even if these workers have no formal (contractual) employment relationship with the client organization, if the quality of social interactions they have with permanent employees and their direct supervisor is highly maintained, they will definitely recognize themselves as full members of the client organization. This will lead in fine to a strong commitment of these temporary workers in the client organization and will enhance their investment.

Keywords: Agency workers, Organizational inclusion perception, Organizational commitment, Burundi.

Introduction

Organizations are increasingly using agency workers to fill their need for labor. The growing use of this alternative mode of employment

reflects the widespread need of organizations to lower their labor costs and increase their level of flexibility (Houseman 2014). However, some believe that these benefits are often acquired at the expense of a less internalization of the values of the organization by these workers and at the expense of productivity. Thus, one of the elements on which agency workers can differentiate themselves is their perception of organizational inclusion. Due to the limited duration of their employment contract with the organization, the management literature generally categorizes the latter as peripheral workers, “outsiders”, with whom the organization maintains a more transactional relationship which results in lower investment by both parties (Lapalme *et al.* 2007). To our knowledge, no study has been undertaken to analyze this phenomenon in Burundi even though many agencies have emerged such as Akazi Interim, Infinity Group, NFT, to name a few and are employing a high number of Burundian young persons.

Globally, previous studies about agency workers have focused on their wages and “temporality” (Houseman 2014; Contouris *et al.* 2016), Job Satisfaction (Håkansson *et al.* 2013), their social and economic impact on the (micro)economy of a country (Belkacem 2013), among others. A study similar to this one has focused on Organization Inclusion Perception, Organizational Commitment and Discretionary Behaviors (Lapalme *et al.* 2007). It is partially to confirm or infirm its findings that we have undertaken this study.

In this study, we will focus more specifically on the perception of inclusion of these workers in the client organization and their level of commitment to the latter. These workers represent a specific category of workers who are characterized by the fact that they are employed by an organization (agency), but do their work in another (client organization). They are therefore unrelated formal employment with the client organization in which they work. Objectively, they are not considered employees of the

latter (Lapalme *et al.* 2007). This situation leads to greater ambiguity regarding the status of these workers in the organization and their relationship with the latter. So, the objective of this study is to assess, as a first step, how certain elements which characterize the relationship that the client organization and its permanent workers have with the agency workers can influence their perception of organizational inclusion and, secondly, how this perception of inclusion influences their degree of investment in the client organization, in particular the level of affective organizational commitment. This study will therefore help to provide a better understanding of the agency workers' business deal by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of perception of inclusion on the level of commitment of the agency workers. Lastly, the general hypothesis to test, as suggested by Lapalme *et al.* (2007), is that, beyond their status as peripheral workers, agency workers can perceive themselves as full members of the organization in which they work and invest themselves more in it only if some conditions are met. Findings of this study will definitely help both agency and client organizations to manage agency workers. In addition, besides enriching the stock of knowledge, the study also opens a debate on a long-neglected course of studies in Burundi; namely the Organizational Behavior (OB) and its linked issues such as Organizational Inclusion Perception and Organizational Commitment.

Hypotheses development

Perception of organizational inclusion among agency workers

According to Houseman (2014), we have three (3) types of employment:

1. ***Regular employment***: workers that are directly hired in open-ended contracts by the company seeking their services. They are covered by a country's employment protection laws, which may specify

notice periods or severance payments if the employee is dismissed.

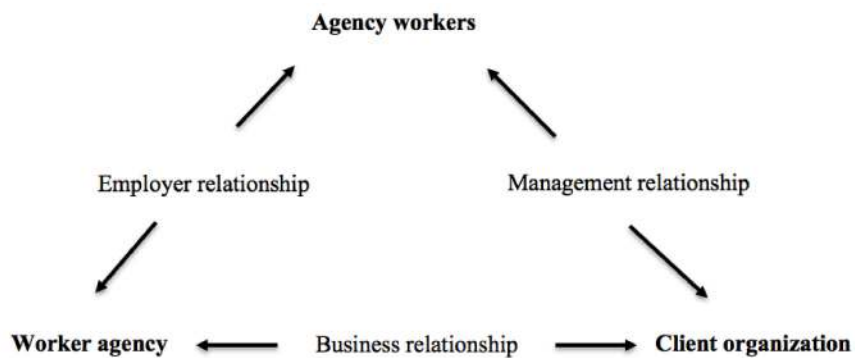
2. **Temporary agency employment:** workers that are the legal employees of the temporary help agency but perform work for a client organization at the client's worksite and under its supervision. In some cases, but not most, temporary agency employees have open-ended contracts with the agency and have the same protections against dismissal as regular employees.
3. **Fixed-term contract or direct-hire temporary employment:** workers that are hired directly by the firm that uses their services and are the legal employees of that firm. They are hired for a fixed period of time specified in the contract and so are easily dismissed when the contract period is over.

As mentioned earlier, the last few years have been marked by a strong growth in the outsourcing phenomenon of the work force. The use of agency workers is undoubtedly one of the most examples of blatant outsourcing. Due to the limited administrative control of the organization, but also due to the fixed duration of their employment relationship, agency workers are considered as external workers or peripheral devices. This idea is moreover reflected in the writings of Rousseau (1995) (cited in Lapalme *et al.* 2007) which suggested that unlike the internalisation that leads individuals to the status of full members of organization (insiders), outsourcing creates peripheral members (outsiders).

Inclusion is the degree to which an employee perceives that she or he is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies her or his needs for belongingness and uniqueness. There is a theme of belongingness such as "accepted", "insider" and "sense of belonging" (Shore *et al.* 2011). A scholar named Mor Barak developed a theoretical model of inclusion in which she posed that diversity and organizational culture would contribute to perceptions of inclusion-

exclusion, which would then lead to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, individual wellbeing and task effectiveness (Shore *et al.* 2011). Moreover, perception of inclusion is positively influenced by the level of organizational support perceived by the employee. Thus, one might think that agent workers may perceive themselves as full members of the organization they work for as far as the organization treats them as such, regardless of their contract status (Lapalme *et al.* 2007).

Figure 1: Triangle relationship pattern in the worker agency business area



Source: adapted from Håkansson et al. (2013).

Perceptions of justice in relation to the organization

Perceptions of organizational justice constitute important indicators of the quality of the employee's relationship with the organization and the immediate superior. Organizational justice has three (3) key components: (i) Distributive justice, (ii) Procedural justice and (iii) Interactional justice. In general, the first two (2) forms refer to justice in the relationship between the employee and the organization while the latter targets the relationship between the employee and his immediate supervisor (Lapalme *et al.* 2007).

Specifically, distributive justice is regarding decisions fairness in the organization. Distributive justice conjectures that employees are equally treated in rewards distribution from job outcome. Distributive justice discusses resources distribution while keeping employees' participation and rewards. Procedural justice is related to the employee's perceived organization decision making process fairness. This form of justice is favored by the application of certain rules such as the existence of procedures clear, explicit and impartial decision-making, the control of the processes leading to the decision and the presence of formal appeal mechanisms. Interactional justice lastly talks about employees' relationship with organization and organization treatment regarding employees' respect (Sarfraz *et al.* 2018). A feeling of injustice could negatively influence their perception of inclusion because it reflects the differentiation that the organization makes between permanent and agency of workers. In contrast, the more workers' agency staff will feel treated fairly compared to permanent employees, the more they will have the impression of being full members of the client organization (Lapalme *et al.* 2007).

Perceived support from permanent workers of the client organization

Support from permanent employees of the organization can also help reinforce agency workers' perception of inclusion. Some research has highlighted the social isolation that afflicts agency workers. Organizational socialization literature emphasizes that permanent employees of the client organization can be more reluctant to help temporary workers because of the short-term nature of their relationship. The status of outsiders is therefore increased due to this social life exclusion. Support from permanent employees of the client organization would therefore be an important element that could contribute to the perception of inclusion of agency workers. Informal relationships with permanent colleagues can

act as an important vehicle for agency workers' inclusion in the social fabric of the organization (Lapalme *et al.* 2007).

Effect of the perception of inclusion on organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is a psychological stabilizing or obliging force that binds individuals to courses of action relevant to the organization. Initially conceptualized as a unidimensional construct, organizational commitment is now known to be multidimensional in nature. The most common forms of organizational commitment studied and reported on in the academic literature are affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment (Meyer and Allen's model of organizational commitment). However, since affective commitment is more likely to reflect primary feelings and attitudes toward the job and its components and expresses a more holistic approach to conceptualizing about the nature of the employee relationship as it rests on the individuals' "psychological bond" and "loyalty to the organization", it dominates the organizational commitment literature (Carrière *et al.* 2007; Azim, 2016).

Affective organizational commitment specifically refers to the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Existing research reveals that organizational commitment is positively related to job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviors, motivation, attendance, job performance and life satisfaction. Furthermore, it is negatively related to tardiness, absenteeism, intent to leave the organization and turnover (Carrière *et al.* 2007). Employees with a strong affective organizational commitment mindset view indeed their jobs as encompassing a broader range of behaviors than employees who feel weak affective organizational commitment or who experience other forms of organizational commitment (Hunter & Gellatly 2007).

Affective organizational commitment is therefore partly dependent on the employee's perception whether or not she/he is a member of the

organization he works for. At the heart of the definition and measure of emotional commitment lies in the individual's sense of belonging to the organization. An individual who is strongly emotionally committed to the organization, has the impression of belonging to the latter. The feeling of belonging differentiates the members who are part of the community and members who are excluded. It is therefore more likely that the individual who appears to be a full member of the organization will be more emotionally engaged than one who feels excluded. For an agency worker, being considered as a full member of the client organization and not just as a peripheral resource shows a form of commitment by the organization that manifests itself beyond the purely transactional relationship that links these two actors. In return of this commitment, the agency worker will therefore be more inclined to commit himself to the client organization (Lapalme *et al.* 2007).

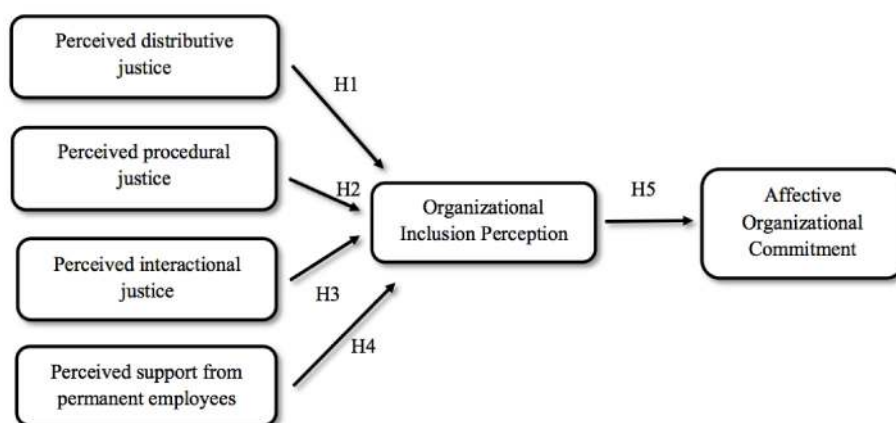
Study hypotheses

Based on the discussion above, the study poses five hypotheses such as (figure 2):

1. **H1:** Perceived distributive justice will positively influence the perception of inclusion of agency workers;
2. **H2:** Perceived procedural justice will positively influence the perception of inclusion agency workers;
3. **H3:** Perceived interactional justice will positively influence the perception of inclusion of agency workers;
4. **H4:** Perceived support from permanent employees will positively influence the perception of inclusion of agency workers;

5. **H5:** Organizational inclusion perception of agency workers will positively influence their level of affective organizational commitment.

Figure 2: Research framework



Source: adapted from Lapalme et al. (2007).

Methodology

Sampling

The study was carried out with agency workers employed by a Burundian financial institution. All in all, 60 questionnaires were distributed and 50 were returned and judged usable, giving a response rate of 83%. Our sample was made of 42% of women and 58% of men. The average age of our respondents was 28.8 years old and their average seniority level in the host organization was 16.2 months.

Measures

The study questionnaire, developed by the researcher, was an adaptation of pre-existing work-related psychometric measures developed by Lapalme *et al.* (2007). Only quantitative data were collected.

1. ***Perceived distributive justice (equity, fairness principle vis-à-vis permanent workers)***: in order to measure perception fairness compared to permanent employees of the client organization, we used the measure of five items.
2. ***Perceived procedural justice***: perception of procedural justice was measured by using four items.
3. ***Perceived interactional justice***: perception of interactional justice was measured by using two items.
4. ***Perceived support from permanent employees***: perceived employee support was measured by using four items.
5. ***Organizational inclusion perception***: perception of organizational inclusion was measured by using a three-items scale.
6. ***Affective organizational commitment***: affective organizational engagement has been measured by using a five-items scale.

Analysis

The study used a Binary logistic regression to analyze the data collected. In general terms, Logistic regression consists in linking a dependent variable y with one or more explanatory variables x_1, x_2, \dots, x_p , called predictors/independent variables. Furthermore, Binary logistic regression is used where variables of the study have only two classes (Gillet *et al.* 2011), which was the case for our study.

Findings

Table 1: Binary Logistic regression results

ORGANIZATIONAL INCLUSION PERCEPTION			
Variables	Coefficients	Odds value	p-value*
Perceived Distributive Justice	2.0	14.2	1.32
Perceived Procedural Justice	- 2.5	.07	- 1.18
Perceived Interactional Justice	3.4	32.7	1.95
Perceived Support from Permanent Employees	5.2	184.1	2.35
AFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT			
Organizational Inclusion Perception	1.5	4.6	1.37

N=50, *p<0.05.

Table 1 shows that perceptions of fairness in relation to permanent workers, interactional justice and supportive justice of permanent employees are positively related to the perception of organizational inclusion, thus confirming hypotheses H1, H3 and H4. On the other hand, the hypothesis H2 which states that perception of procedural justice can positively influence perception of inclusion of workers agency is rejected since findings showed a negative relationship instead between these two (2) variables.

In terms of consequences associated with perception of inclusion of agency workers, our results support the hypothesis H5 since the perception of inclusion in the client organization influences significantly the level of emotional commitment of agency workers.

Discussion

Overall, our results support the general hypothesis underlying this research, namely that beyond their objective status as peripheral workers, agency workers can perceive themselves as full members of the organization in which they work and, consequently, invest more in it. This was also the hypothesis made by the study of Lapalme *et al.* (2007). According to these scholars (Lapalme *et al.* 2007), there is a continuum of inclusion organizational associated with the employment contract which extends from the internalization to the externalization of workforce. Organizational inclusion can be defined outside the employment contract that binds the organization and the agency workers and is built on the quality of social relationships that the latter maintains with the different temporary employees of the client organization. Indeed, our results support the assertion that the quality of the treatment of agency workers by the organization and its agents influences their perception of organizational inclusion.

The quality of treatment offered by the organization was measured by perceptions of distributive and procedural justice. Our results show that when agency workers feel that what they receive from the client organization is fair compared to permanent employees, they see themselves more as full members of it. Organizations can distinguish between full members and peripheral members of the organization by offering different rewards to these two (2) groups of employees. The rewards or benefits offered by the organization therefore act as signals indicating to workers whether or not they have achieved full member status. Of course, being given the flexibility and cost reduction objectives targeted by the use of agency workers, few organizations will offer the same benefits to these workers as to their employees permanent. However, by making sure to establish a certain equity between these two groups of workers (agency workers and permanent employees), the organization

sends a positive signal to agency workers regarding its willingness to integrate and include the latter (Lapalme *et al.* 2007).

Lapalme *et al.* (2007) tried to explain the non-significant relationship between the perception of procedural justice and the perception of organizational inclusion of agency workers by the fact that being in the client organization for a short period of time, agency workers did not have time to familiarize themselves adequately with the procedures leading to decision making in the organization. They recommended that assessing the effect of procedural justice on perception of inclusion organizational of agency workers with greater organizational seniority would allow this hypothesis to be verified. Nevertheless, the average seniority of their sample was 28 weeks while ours was 16.2 months. One can assert then that perceived fairness of procedures does not really affect agency workers because they might see themselves as not bound by those procedures.

Our results highlight the paramount role of immediate supervisors and interactions with permanent workers. When the immediate supervisor of agency workers treats them with respect and dignity, the latter feel more included in the organization and *in fine* see themselves as full members. The same thing happens when there is a friendly working environment and when they can interact constantly with permanent workers. These results support the relational model of environment which suggests that the individual determine their status in the group (or organization) from how they are treated by members of the latter (Håkansson *et al.* 2013).

With regard to the consequences of perception of organizational inclusion for agency workers, our results show that the more they feel included in the client organization, the more they are emotionally committed to this organization. As we mentioned previously, the main thing that distinguishes these workers from permanent employees is that they do

not have formal employment link with the client organization. Indeed, the latter has in fact very little of obligations towards those workers who do not have the status of “employee”. It can therefore, in a very legit way, restrict the nature of their relationship to economic issues. Following social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity (Shore *et al.* 2011), being considered as a full member of the organization will generate a feeling of greater investment in the organization.

Conclusion

Our study had provided two (2) main contributions to the management literature. On the one hand, our research provides a better understanding of several management phenomena such as organizational inclusion, affective commitment. It further linked them to the agency workers phenomenon. As earlier mentioned, Organizational Behavior Management is a very little researched topic in the management literature in Burundi and few studies have indeed put a focus on it. Our study has then started a discussion on how psychological aspects affect workers behaviors and outcomes, even if the latter are agency workers. On the other hand, our study has provided insights to institutions employing contingent workers to how they can effectively influence the level of organizational commitment of agency workers.

The results of our research must be interpreted with regard to its limitations however. (1) First of all, it is important to note that our data was collected during a single period. It did not enable us then to determine with certainty the relation between our variables as could do a longitudinal study. (2) Like most of our constructed were measured from the same source, namely agency workers, it is possible that some of our results are subject to common variance bias. (3) Finally, a final limit relates to characteristics and size of our sample. Coming from the banking sector, the agency workers of our research have a higher level of

qualification than the average of agency workers in general. Being given their level of qualification, it is possible that this type of resource is not considered by the organization as a peripheral workforce as well as less skilled workers. Lastly, the size of our sample was too small to allow a generalization of findings.

Despite these limitations, our study makes an important contribution by bringing up the understanding of concepts such as perception of inclusion in relation to emotional commitment among (agency) workers. It also paves the way towards different avenues of research possible in the organizational behaviour management. Future research should continue in this direction by identifying other aspects such as Job Satisfaction, Corporate Social Responsibility, to name a few.

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Autobiography

Stève Cédric Bizimana is a young Burundian researcher working part-time for a research center (Centre d'Analyses et de Recherches Interdisciplinaires pour le Développement de la Région des Grands Lacs – CARID-RGL) at Université du Lac Tanganyika in Burundi. He is also the “Research and Learning” Head of Department of an international NGO fighting for Human rights. Plus, he has also co-founded and is the Managing Director of a consultancy firm and the Legal representative of a private research center. Academically speaking, he has already published few articles in international and national scientific journals, undertook several studies for its organization and has projects of writing books. He holds a MA in Public Administration and Management from Nkumba University (Uganda) and a BA in Political Science and International Relations from Université du Lac Tanganyika (Burundi).