A quantitative study to ascertain if there is a difference in the level of psychological safety experienced by temporary employees in comparison to that of permanent employees

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Abstract

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by Sinead Boyle

Purpose - This research seeks to examine if there are varying levels of psychological safety experienced between temporary employees and permanent employees. Employee engagement and employee voice are also investigated in the same manner as a result of the review of the literature which indicated a relationship between psychological safety and these two constructs. It is proposed here that there is much research on these constructs but only a very small amount of research has investigated temporary employment in this regard. Temporary employment is now a consistent feature of the modern workplace along with employee input and collaboration being recognised as a vital component of an organization's competitive advantage. The research indicates that temporary employees can face challenges unique to their employment status. Arguably, these challenges are not compatible with features of psychological safety, employee engagement and employee voice such as expression of suggestions and concerns. Therefore this research explores the prospect that temporary employees are at risk of being less inclined to express these behaviours in contrast to permanent employees.

Methodology - This study adapted the epistemological philosophy of positivism. A deductive approach was used to test the theory relating to temporary employment which emerged as a result of a review of the literature. The results were acquired with the use of a quantitative questionnaire.

Findings - The results of this particular work indicate that there was no difference in levels of psychological safety between temporary and permanent employees. Temporary employees reported lower levels of employee engagement and employee voice than permanent employees.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Background of the Research

Psychological safety has an expansive reach, not being a requirement for any one sector alone. A notable feature of today's workplace is the growth of the employment by firms of temporary staff which has seen a surge in Europe since the 1990's and which is becoming increasingly embedded in recruitment practices (Drury, 2016). Also noteworthy is the recognition of psychological safety as a key contributor, both on a team and an organizational level, in enabling employees to feel comfortable to express themselves without fear of social embarrassment or punishment (Edmondson, 1999; Nguyen *et al*, 2017). Research indicates that temporary employment can bring with it various obstacles for the employee, therefore this study will seek to understand if there is a variation in levels of psychological safety between temporary and permanent employees. Employee engagement and employee voice have also been shown as being key to organizational progress and research has shown a strong link with psychological safety. Therefore they form part of the research questions in relation to varying levels of these constructs between temporary and permanent employees. A brief introduction to psychological safety, employee engagement and employee voice, as well an overview of temporary employment follows.

Psychological Safety

An organisational culture that is high in psychological safety is typically a place where employees will use their voice to contribute, make suggestions, and discuss mistakes they have made or witnessed. They will also feel able to express concerns without fear of negative consequences or resulting interpersonal issues, thus helping to prevent an organisation from becoming stagnant in its practices and processes (Kwon *et al*, 2020). Psychological safety strengthens communication in teams, increases creativity and sharing of knowledge (Newman *et al*, 2017). This

is particularly significant due to the increasingly collaborative nature of today's workplace. Viitala and Kantola (2016) refer to the now widely held belief that competitive advantage for firms lies heavily on its people, their interpersonal relations and knowledge. The literature review in Chapter 2 provides a deeper analysis of this.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement can be defined as the extent to which an employee is committed to an organization and this is illustrated by their drive to support the organization in achieving its goals (Govender and Bussin, 2020). This area attracts substantial attention from researchers as well as being a significant area of interest for organizations (Mittal, 2021). Research in this area has increased in the past decade, supporting the suggestion that employee engagement is an important topic both for organizations and individuals (Barreiro and Treglown, 2020). Broad consensus exists that employee engagement is a hugely important factor in an organization's ability to develop and sustain competitive advantage. This is especially true in today's continuously evolving business environment. From a financial perspective, it is wise for organizations to nurture and promote engagement on the part of their employees (Memon *et al*, 2021). Employee engagement has been shown to increase employee productivity as well as having the effect of a decreased turnover of staff (Mendes and Stander, 2011). This area is further investigated in Chapter 2 (literature review).

Employee Voice

Employee voice can be defined as a tool of communication used by employees providing feedback to senior figures in organizations. This feedback provides the opportunity for employers to receive constructive advice based on the expertise of the employee which is generally aimed at improving various aspects of the organization. When employees lend their voice to various issues and problems that exist within their working environment, they are instrumental in helping senior managers become aware of and resolve problems that they may not otherwise have

knowledge of (Yan *et al*, 2021). Research purports that the knowledge attained through employee voice leads to more effective decision-making by organizational managers (Jiang and Yao, 2020). In contrast, the withholding of voice can lead to organizational issues that affect decision-making and creativity (Perlow and Repenning, 2009). Research has demonstrated that employee silence, the opposite of employee voice, can be linked to an employee's desire to leave an organization whilst the ability to express employee voice will have a positive relationship with intention to stay (Jiang and Yao, 2020). This area is explored in Chapter 2 (literature review).

Temporary Employment

It has been documented that temporary employment has increased in the period of recovery following the 2008 financial crisis. Ter Weel (2018) reports that countries such as the Netherlands, France and Spain for example, have seen increasing rates of temporary employment during this period with temporary contracts offering low levels of protection to employees. Ter Weel also asserts that there are now decreased openings for permanent employment in these countries. In a 2021 Economics and Social Research Institute (ERSI) study examining the fundamental features of work including job security and equality of treatment, it was reported that 33% of workers in Ireland in the age bracket of 18 – 24 years are in temporary contractual employment ([www.ersi.ie, 2021](http://www.ersi.ie)). It is notable that a 2015 analysis of employment factors in 20 OECD countries, showed that employment protection legislation (EPL) for temporary employees had reduced substantially from the year 1989 to 2013 (Van Ours, 2015). The significant proliferation of temporary jobs in Europe for example, has frequently been attributed to the rigorous legal controls associated with terminating the employment of permanent employees. This is alongside loose legal restrictions around the creation of temporary contractual work (Cahuc *et al*, 2016). It has been asserted that robust employment protection legislation contributes to increased labour costs and reduces an organization's agility in responding to global and/or local economic difficulty. This makes the choice to hire employees on a temporary basis more attractive to employers (Barbieri and Cutuli, 2016). But what are the consequences associated with this recruitment

trend, both from an employee and an organizational standpoint? High levels of employment instability and economic difficulty for employees are some of the difficulties associated with this type of employment. In a review of labour market flexibility by Kleinknecht and Naastepad (2005), from an organizational outlook, it is noted that a high turnover of staff can lead to a breakdown in cohesion, trust and sharing of tacit knowledge amongst employees. Arguably this creates difficulty for organizations that recruit staff on temporary contracts when it has been established that investment in human capital plays a crucial role in helping a business to flourish. Additional material relating to disadvantages experienced by temporary employees is explored in the literature review in Chapter 2.

Research Objectives

The objective of this research is to ascertain if temporary employees experience differing levels of psychological safety in comparison to that of permanent employees. The areas of employee engagement and employee voice are also explored in the same vein owing to their connection with psychological safety. This objective is based on the research documented in the literature review which indicates that temporary employees can face challenges based on the status of their employment.

Research Aims

The focus of this research is to investigate if temporary employees experience differing levels of psychological safety, employee engagement and employee voice in the workplace in comparison to permanent employees. The overarching aim is to highlight and contribute to an understanding of the potential implications of temporary employees experiencing differing levels of engagement and psychological safety, both from an organizational and employee perspective. It is desired that this area become a point of consideration and a staple item on the agenda of employers when engaging temporary employees.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions and hypotheses formulated for this piece of research are as follows:

Research Questions:

1. Do temporary employees experience differing levels of psychological safety in comparison to that of permanent employees?
2. Do temporary employees report that they are more or less engaged than permanent employees?
3. Do temporary employees experience differences in the degree to which they express employee voice in comparison to that of permanent employees?

Hypotheses:

H1: Temporary employees will experience a difference in levels of psychological safety in comparison to that of permanent employees.

H2: Temporary employees will have different levels of employee engagement in comparison to that of permanent employees.

H3: Temporary employees will experience differences in the degree to which they express employee voice in comparison to that of permanent employees.

Research Justification

The contractual relationship between employers and employees experienced many changes in the last decade and among these is the fact that temporary contracts are becoming progressively more commonplace (Plomp *et al*, 2019; Baruch and Altman, 2016). Organizational success is said to be increasingly reliant on the interpersonal dynamic and exchange of ideas between employees (Harshitha, 2015) and psychological safety, engagement and employee voice have a foundational role in this. In light of temporary employment now being a common feature of modern workforces, exploration is warranted as to whether contractual

elements in an employees' relationship with the organization in which he/she works affects their levels of engagement and psychological safety as well as their propensity to speak up. The literature review on temporary employment indicates that features of this type of employment can be challenging. The increasing prevalence of temporary employment alongside a business world that relies more and more on employees using their voice, taking risks and offering insight presents an opportunity for research that has not been adequately filled. This area merits academic investigation as a result of changes in the labour market and particularly against the backdrop of a dynamic and competitive business environment that requires the co-operation and input of employees.

Gap in the Research

This research is borne of the fact that only a minimal amount of investigation has been carried out in relation to temporary employees in the areas of psychological safety, employee voice and employee engagement. An overview of the literature indicates that much research has been produced which extols the importance of these areas in relation to organizations and the employee experience. The benefits for organizations that are rich in these areas is widely established. For example, organizations make significant financial investment in employee engagement initiatives (Morgan, 2017). However, only a very scant amount of inquiry has been made as to whether temporary employees have different experiences in these areas in comparison to permanent employees. Yet the literature informs us that the face of the labour market has changed radically over the past number of years and a rise in temporary employment is among the results of this. This research will endeavour to contribute towards filling the gap in the research.

Structure of the Study

Chapter 1 - Background of the Research

This chapter provides a brief overview of the areas under exploration in this research. Also provided is an outline of the research objectives and aims followed by the research questions and hypotheses. Justification for the research and the gap that this research seeks to fill is also elaborated on in this section.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This chapter documents and analyses the literature relevant to the areas under consideration in this research. The literature on temporary employment, psychological safety, employee voice and employee engagement is explored. This section ends with the rationale for the research based on a review of the relevant material.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The methodology chapter details the chosen research method and the reasoning behind this choice. An outline of the philosophical approach which underpins this research is provided. Also discussed in this chapter are the sample population, the measures used in the research and the data collection instrument.

Chapter 4 – Findings and Analysis

This chapter provides a breakdown of the descriptive and inferential statistics.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

This chapter reviews the statistical findings for each hypothesis and explores the potential implications of these as well as avenues for future research. The various limitations of this research are observed in this section.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions and Recommendations

The final chapter of this dissertation reviews the course of this research and provides a further note on potential research avenues.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the academic work pertaining to psychological safety and related areas, aiming to explore what psychological safety is as well its origins. Employee engagement and employee voice are constructs which research purports are linked to or are dependent on the presence of psychological safety. Along with psychological safety, both employee voice and employee engagement have been shown to be highly contributory to the development of an organization's competitive advantage and therefore form part of the research questions. Examination of this area is important in demonstrating how the effects of psychological safety are manifested in the workplace through employee engagement and employee voice. The aim of this is to provide a solid understanding of the outcomes for the individual and the organization when psychological safety is present.

The literature review will initially explore how psychological safety is defined in the literature followed by a consideration of the relevance of psychological safety to the world of business. Subsequently, an examination of employee engagement and employee voice will follow, including a review of material that discusses how these constructs relate to psychological safety. Finally, the literature review will conclude with a discussion on research illustrating challenges faced by temporary employees. It is suggested here that these challenges are adverse to the cultivation of the experience of psychological safety. As discussed further on, it is clear that organizations require the contribution and willingness of employees to help deliver new ideas and solutions. This openness and engagement has been shown by research to be facilitated by psychological safety. The question is if temporary employment alters the presence of this and the core of this research is formed by this consideration. A closer look at the concept of psychological safety follows.

What is Psychological Safety?

The research on psychological safety appears to be very much aligned on what it constitutes and how it manifests itself in professional environments. It is most commonly defined as the belief that expressing one's opinions, highlighting problems, disclosing errors and putting forward work-related suggestions will not result in unwanted interpersonal difficulty in the workplace (Mat *et al*, 2019; Liang *et al*, 2012; Dusenberry *et al*, 2020). Although they share many commonalities, psychological safety is distinguishable from the construct of trust in that psychological safety has an internal focus on the self. Psychological safety involves the individual anticipating that other people (e.g. team members and colleagues) will, at the very least, accept the suggestions or viewpoints of the individual in an open fashion. This is in contract to trust, which has a more external outlook whereby the individual looks more to the actions of other people and believes that the future behaviour of others will ultimately be good for the individual (Edmondson, 2002). This distinction helps to sharpen our understanding of what psychological safety is. From this, one could suggest that this is a concept that is quite easily open to misinterpretation. It is possible to envision that a lack of a refined understanding could lead to misuse of the concept. However, a theoretical connection between the two constructs is noted by Frazier *et al* (2017). Understanding the origins of psychological safety as well as examples of its reach will help to deepen comprehension of this area.

Origins and reach of Psychological Safety

Initially studied by organizational academics in the period of the 1960's, predominantly by scholars Edgar Schein and Warren Bennis, within the context of conditions necessary for healthy adjustment to organizational change, psychological safety underwent a resurgence in the 1990's which sees the concept remaining an area of focus today (Edmondson, 2014). In a 1992 article, Schein asserts that for learning and change to take place in an organization, the condition of psychological safety must be created for employees through for example, the acceptance of the potential for human error and through the encouragement and

reward of experimentation and innovation. The importance of the role of psychological safety in processes of change and improvement is illustrated in a 2003 study by Baer and Frese in which they refer to innovations in processes concerned with production such as Total Quality Management and Just-in-Time Production as most likely to be successful when adapted in an environment where staff feel confident to show initiative and be collaborative with colleagues. Baer and Frese state that many companies have reported that these renowned processes have not adequately helped the business to achieve its objectives as expected and posit that a potential cause of this is neglect of strongly influencing factors such as organizational climate and specifically within that, psychological safety. The scenario put forward by Baer and Frese differs to that of Schein in that their research refers to the impact of psychological safety explicitly on the effectiveness of established production processes but this serves to show how pervasive the effects of psychological safety are. The commonality of these studies is that psychological safety is central to successful change and improvement in that discussed by Schein and Baer and by Frese, albeit from different angles. Understanding that the long-recognized standardised processes referred to above are influenced by the presence of psychological safety helps to widen understanding of this concept. In order to advance an understanding of the potential consequences regarding lack of psychological safety in the workplace, it is beneficial to examine its importance in today's world of business.

Psychological safety and its increasing importance in today's business world

The need for collaboration and sharing of ideas among colleagues and teams in the achievement of organizational success is now widely recognized. This is formally termed as *knowledge sharing* and refers to the sharing of gained experience and skills (Castaneda and Ramirez, 2021). Knowledge is of continuing importance in a globally competitive world and organizations have an increasing focus in this area (Omerzel and Gulev, 2011). Filleri (2010) states that the competitive environment is ever evolving and rapidly changing, with firms pursuing continuous learning and development of knowledge. The sharing of knowledge requires that groups and

teams are able to join forces in a shared objective for the benefit of the organization (Zubanov *et al*, 2017). Central to knowledge sharing is the belief that the combined knowledge and skills acquired by employees are intangible assets that are very difficult for competitors to imitate (Abdul-Jalal *et al*, 2013). The power of the combined knowledge of employees forms a unique and inimitable competitive advantage for an organization. Research has shown that teams with a high degree of interpersonal trust will show a higher level of collaboration than teams with lower levels of trust (Parayitam *et al*, 2010). In 2004, it was noted by Bennet and Bennet that the then current objectives of many organizations had come to include an emphasis on sharing and networking. Bennet and Bennet observed the recognition on the part of organizations of the need to have collaborative teams in order to achieve agility in their processes and increase customer satisfaction. They also state that the future challenges of organizations would be to facilitate the creativity of their employees and from this it can be inferred that there was a growing recognition of the need for cognitive as opposed to functional input from employees. From the perspective of knowledge sharing and organizational success, it can be considered imperative that the processes behind such creativity not only be developed but also shared amongst colleagues. In order for employee knowledge to be adapted, it must be shared (Cabrera *et al*, 2006) and organizations that achieve success in this area will be more able to adapt to an ever changing environment (Abdul-Jalal *et al*, 2013).

Whilst knowledge sharing enables organizations to leverage the experience of employees, avoid duplicative efforts and be innovative, it can present a challenge to the employee who holds the knowledge due to their uncertainty as to how it will be received and used (Cyr and Choo, 2010). The withholding of knowledge on the part of employees has long been an issue for organizations (Issac *et al*, 2020). However, it was demonstrated by Men *et al* (2020) in a survey of 436 employees across 78 teams, that the presence of psychological safety had a negative impact on knowledge hiding. To understand the reasons as to what might contribute to this reticence to share knowledge and to understand the role played by psychological safety, it is beneficial to look at the different types of knowledge in more detail.

Knowledge can be categorized in two ways; explicit or implicit (tacit). Explicit knowledge is of an external and less individual nature than tacit knowledge, being available for all persons to acquire, should they wish to do so (e.g. books, reports, databases). An employee's tacit knowledge is based on perceptions and insights accumulated over time from their own individual experience and is often difficult to articulate and express (Jones, 2002; Haldin-Herrgard, 2000). This type of knowledge is hard to formalize but is equally an important component in knowledge sharing as that of explicit knowledge. A relationship between trust levels and willingness to share knowledge has been documented in the literature (Luzar and Zoran, 2020). A 2010 study by Holste and Fields indicated that a relationship with a colleague characterized by affective trust had a significantly positive impact on an employee's willingness to share tacit knowledge. Holste and Fields state that the element of trust is required as the knowledge sharer needs to be sure that their knowledge will be understood, used appropriately and that their standing in the organization will not be compromised as a result of their openness. It can also be considered that this knowledge can be difficult to verbalize due to its intuitive nature and therefore a strong interpersonal relationship is required to help the knowledge sharer to express themselves. The result of Holste and Field's 2010 work was also echoed in a 2007 study by Lin which indicated that low levels of tacit knowledge sharing is connected to low levels of trust between co-workers.

Research has demonstrated that psychological safety has a strengthening effect on the relationship between knowledge sharing and other impactful variables such as psychological availability and leadership (Qian *et al*, 2020). According to Siemsen *et al* (2008), psychological safety is a significant factor in the enablement of knowledge sharing. In a study focussing on the necessity of psychological safety in research and development project teams, the findings of Liu and Keller (2021) endorse that of previous research by both Huang and Jiang (2012) and Edmondson (2014) that psychological safety is linked positively to team learning. The results of Liu and Keller's research affirms their hypothesis that psychological safety facilitates knowledge sharing which in turn allows teams to question existing activities and be innovative. The fact that this particular research is conducted on research and development teams is both a strength and a limitation in terms of its wider application of psychological safety. Research and development can be highly

ambiguous and concentrated work and so it is arguable that it is not entirely representative of all teams. However, it is arguably applicable to any working situation that requires and benefits from the sharing of knowledge by employees. Additional research would add to the development of an understanding of the relationship between psychological safety and knowledge sharing in different types of teams. Also, it would be beneficial to examine the impact that different employment types might have in this area (e.g. temporary versus permanent). As referred to above, the literature on psychological safety has shown it that plays a key role in the area of employee engagement. This is explored in the next section.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is instrumental in helping an organization achieve its goals by working to promote commitment from its employees as well as employee alignment with company objectives and values. It is vital to business success in an increasingly dynamic environment (Harshitha, 2015). An employee that is engaged will maintain an awareness of the business environment and be keen to take action to support the organization in which they work (Veshne and Munshi, 2020). Research has demonstrated that psychological safety can have a facilitative effect on employee engagement. Establishing on a granular level the elements that constitute employee engagement as described in the literature and having an enhanced understanding of it is important when considering the relationship of this concept with psychological safety.

Understanding as to what constitutes employee engagement differs in the research (Kosaka and Sato, 2020). This construct has shared features with other concepts such as organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour which can lead to misuse and misunderstanding of the term. For example, whilst organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour are defined by an employee's attitude towards the organization (OC) and involvement in voluntary acts which are supportive of the organization (OCB), employee engagement encompasses the individual's commitment of themselves on a cognitive, emotional and physical level to their role within the organization (Saks, 2006; Khan, 1990). It is a concept which has also been used interchangeably in the literature with the

term work engagement. However, it has been suggested that these two concepts should be considered separately as they have been measured differently in much of the research. Work engagement has typically been measured using a scale which focuses on the actual role of the employee specifically, whilst research related to engagement has focused on the three sub factors of cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement and the scale has applied to not only the employee's specific role but their relationship with the team and the organization also (Kosaka and Sato, 2020).

As documented above, employee engagement is considered an essential part of helping an organization flourish in a constantly changing environment and the literature helps us to understand why this is the case. For example, there is much evidence to show that employee engagement is positively related to innovation on the part of employees. Several studies have examined employee engagement from the perspective of innovative behaviours. It has been demonstrated that engaged employees show a tendency to be active when it comes to problem solving and also have a more experimental mindset, leading to an increased propensity to generate and implement fresh ideas and approaches (Ganji *et al*, 2021; Jung and Yoon, 2018). Employees that are engaged display characteristics which are highly conducive to innovation such as resilience and determination (van Zyl *et al*, 2021). Employee engagement encompasses the three key components of cognitive, emotional and physical engagement that are required for the often strenuous activity of innovation. Cognitive engagement enables employees to critique existing solutions and structures with a view to generating ideas for change whilst emotional engagement helps the innovator to retain their belief in the significance of what they are trying to achieve. This endeavour can often be in the face of resistance to change on the part of various stakeholders. Physical engagement helps to provide the stamina needed for what can be a relentless and arduous process (Kwon and Kim, 2020). The role of employee engagement in innovative work behaviour, as recognized in the literature, provides a practical demonstration of one of the ways in which this construct plays a valuable part in organizational improvement and success. Identifying innovation as an outcome of employee engagement helps to provide a picture of the more tangible output and effects of this concept. It is essential, not only to examine the output of employee engagement, but also to

consider the mediating and predictive factors which contribute to its presence. Accordingly, a look at the relationship between psychological safety and employee engagement forms the next part of this review.

Psychological Safety and Employee engagement

Research conducted by Khan (1990) which concentrated on employees in two dissimilar industries illustrates the role played by psychological safety on an individual's choice to engage in their role and organization. Khan's qualitative research established a correlation between levels of psychological safety and engagement in both industries, with higher levels of psychological safety leading to correspondingly higher levels of employee engagement. In the research, Khan purports that engagement leads to an involved and buoyant performance on the part of the employee as a result of them feeling able to bring the features of their personality which they favour the most to their work and their organization. In this respect, they apply the "best" of themselves to their role on a cognitive, physical and emotional level and owing to psychologically safe conditions, feel that they can do so. According to Khan, the opposite of this would see an employee remove themselves psychologically from the role and feel the need to guard themselves in the environment, leading to a lack of expression of thought and creative contribution to the organization.

It can be suggested that a particular strength of this research is that it was conducted on organizations in two very different sectors, one being a summer camp for teenagers with the focus being on the experience of the counsellors employed to work with the camp members. The other organization was a highly successful and growing architectural firm. The participants from the architectural firm were specifically selected so as to enable the researcher to ensure employees from different levels within the organization were included. There was also diversity of age and gender in this group. The camp group was also diverse in terms of gender and number of years' experience at the camp. The researcher chose to work with these two very different groups as a result of his desire to make the concepts and findings applicable in a broad sense. The inclusion of two different organizations in this research helps to support the contention that psychological safety has an

influence across diverse areas. However, in recognizing the strengths of the selection of these two groups, it must be noted that the groups were relatively small with sixteen members in each which represents a potential shortcoming of this research as it is problematic to extrapolate these results to a larger population. Also, whilst the two organizations belonged to dissimilar industries, it is arguably difficult to make inferences about the connection between psychological safety and employee engagement across a broader range of organizations based on these results alone. It can be proposed that more diversity in terms of industry spread would perhaps have strengthened this research in its findings. The remarks concerning this research are made in an isolated evaluation, however this ethnographic research is widely referenced throughout the literature and provided a vital theoretical foundation for additional investigation. For example, a study by May *et al* (2004) produced results which supported Khan's 1990 study, also demonstrating that psychological safety is positively related to employee engagement. It should be acknowledged that this study lacked diversity in terms of industry, similar to Khan's work, in that the research was carried out on one company. It is also worth noting that of the 213 respondents in this study, 86.7% were female, leaving this study open to criticisms of gender imbalance. More recent research (Ariani, 2015) produced results consistent with the studies of both Khan and May *et al* in terms the relationship between employee engagement and psychological safety. This research had a response rate of 191 employees from different private companies in Indonesia (the industry or industries are not documented) and included psychological safety under the umbrella of psychological conditions along with psychological meaningfulness and psychological availability. The results showed that psychological safety (as a factor within psychological conditions) had a positive relationship with employee engagement. Also, psychological conditions were shown to be a mediating factor in the worker/supervisor relationship and employee engagement. Both the studies of May (2004) and Ariani (2015), although not without various limitations, strengthen the findings of Khan's work and help to provide indicators of the direction that future research could take. For example, a multi-industry study on the association between psychological safety and employee engagement could serve to ascertain how universal the effects of this relationship are. As referred to at the start of this

review, employee voice also has been shown to be a product of psychological safety and an examination of this relationship is presented next.

Employee Voice

A discussion of employee voice is necessary in order to realize why and how it is affected by the presence of psychological safety. This construct has been conceptualized in different ways in the literature, not being restricted to any one particular area and can encompass areas as broad as remuneration and operational processes. The concept is a strong consideration in the areas of organizational behaviour, industrial relations and human resource management but can have different connotations in each of these areas.

Organizational behaviour has viewed employee voice as a channel for employees to voice suggestions and viewpoints which ultimately benefits the organization whilst industrial relations sees the employee speaking up about issues that have a more practical impact on the workforce in terms of compensation and conditions of work (Wilkinson *et al*, 2020). The literature lends understanding that employee voice can be perceived in disparate ways by disciplines that focus on different agendas. Being aware of this helps to prevent assumptions about this construct and provides a more rounded understanding of this area. For the purposes of this research, organizational behaviour is the discipline that is the most suitable lens to look through insofar as that it views employee feedback as beneficial for the organization, is of a collaborative bent and is not focussed on formal mechanisms of communication such as trade unions. However, organizational behaviour has been criticized as placing emphasis on organizational interests as a result of the constructive feedback of employees as opposed to focussing on the welfare of the employee (Barry and Wilkinson, 2015). This would differ to psychological safety in which the individual will feel they are in circumstances which are amenable to allowing them to use their voice, which may or may not be of benefit to their organization, but ultimately this facilitates the creation of a healthy and communicative relationship that benefits both parties.

Psychological Safety and Employee Voice

Broadly speaking, employee voice can be defined as the vehicle through which employees can express their opinions and views in order to have an impact on the way in which the organization they are employed by is operated (Wilkinson *et al*, 2020). This construct can generally be divided into two types, that of prohibitive voice and promotive voice and is viewed as the mechanism through which an employee expresses their ideas to relevant personnel within the organization. Prohibitive voice is demonstrated when an employee articulates concerns regarding organizational processes and practices which the employee may consider to be damaging to the organization whilst the content of promotive voice is focussed on ideas and suggestions to improve aspects of the organization (Song *et al*, 2019). Prohibitive voice, which tends to have a more of a focus on the past and/or present, is more likely to be met with defensiveness by the receiver, as it raises issues that may call into question the viability of long existing practices and processes (Chamberlin *et al*, 2017). The fear that speaking up will need to negative outcomes can cause employees to withhold knowledge and opinions (Butler and Whiting, 2019). Milliken *et al* (2003), in their research consisting of 40 employees across different organizations, showed that half of the respondents did not feel comfortable voicing their concerns about various organizational issues, whilst most had experienced discomfort at one time in raising issues to their supervisors. This serves to inform an understanding of why psychological safety is instrumental in the decision of an employee to use their voice. From the literature, employee voice can be viewed, whether it be prohibitive or promotive, as challenging organizational norms and it is conceivable that this is more likely to take place in an organization that genuinely encourages employees to express their opinions. Regardless of whether that voice is cautionary or creative, an organization high in psychological safety will typically not respond in a way that could be destructive to the employee. An organization with a culture rich in psychological safety will see a higher level of promotive employee voice and innovation (Miao *et al*, 2020). Several studies have reinforced the contention that employee perception of psychological safety affects the use of employee voice with the presence of psychological safety positively related to use of employee voice. A 2009 study Walumbwa and Schaubroeck

conducted on 1,116 employees of a well-established financial institution in the United States found that psychological safety facilitated the relationship between leadership and employee voice. Similarly, Ge's study (2020) conducted on 153 employees in a large Chinese manufacturing organization also indicated a positive relationship between psychological safety and employee voice. Furthermore, in a study with a sample population of 374 participants from across 46 organizations, psychological safety was shown to interact with High Performance Work Systems to promote a high level of promotive voice (Miao *et al*, 2020). High Performance Work Systems are said to recognise employees as being key in the achievement of competitive advantage and this is achieved by encouraging employee participation in decision-marking (Lee and Bang, 2012). Additionally, Liang *et al* (2012), in a two-wave panel study of 239 employees which aimed to demonstrate how three antecedents predict employee voice identified psychological safety as being strongly related to prohibitive voice. The combination of these studies presents strong evidence as to the relationship between psychological safety and employee voice.

The above analyses shows that the employee relationship with the organization is multi-layered and has the potential to be complex. The following review of the research regarding temporary employment supports the suggestion that this type of employment can present additional challenges and reinforces the question regarding the compatibility of psychological safety, employee engagement and employee voice with temporary employment.

Temporary Employment

Temporary employment is on the increase. In 2013, 40.2 million people were engaged in temporary employment on a global scale, representing an approximate increase of 9.6% from the previous year (Chambel *et al*, 2016). The employment of temporary staff serves the organization with a number of benefits such as flexibility of headcount and reduced financial commitment (Chambel *et al*, 2016) with the same reasons being cited by Nollen as far back as 1996. Whilst the literature also points to benefits of temporary employment which include positive effects on employment rates as well as it being a perceived potential entry into permanent

employment (Marica, 2018), it suggests that employers are more likely to be on the receiving end of such benefits. For example, Cetrulo *et al* (2019), in an exploration on the impact of the growth of temporary employment on innovation and new product development, point to advantages of labour flexibility for employers such as temporary employment being a type of screening of employee productivity. Also, noted is the reduced protection of temporary employees in cases of organizational restructuring and the aforementioned reduction of financial commitment.

Employment status has a bearing on health with labour status and individual health situations being strongly connected (Dawson *et al*, 2015). Research which focussed on temporary employees has presented the assertion that job insecurity can present risk of psychological challenges to the individual (Urbini *et al*, 2020). The literature also refers to loneliness amongst temporary workers and indicates that they experience more loneliness at work as well as lower job satisfaction (Moens *et al*, 2021). These factors lend weight to the consideration that the experience with regards to psychological safety, employee engagement and employee voice is different to that of permanent employees. A two-wave panel study by Xiaoye *et al* (2020) conducted on 355 participants across 4 different organizations aimed to examine if employment status (in terms of temporary or permanent) had an effect on an employee's predilection to use their voice. The results indicated that temporary employees were less inclined than their permanent colleagues to participate in the use of promotive voice.

Issues such as exploitation and stigmatization are undoubtedly contrary to the experience of a psychologically safe environment. Temporary employees recognize the potential for exploitation within a team and see the possibility of exploitation through, for example, overwork and also receiving different treatment in comparison to that of permanent employees (Chakraborty and Chakravarti, 2019). It is arguable that this perception is contrary to the interpersonal conditions required to promote a culture of psychological safety and raises questions about the impact that this can have on temporary employees and their experience of their workplace.

Stigmatization is also a risk amongst those in temporary employment. Temporary workers can be the victims of stigmatization and can become stereotyped according to Boyce *et al*, (2007) who refer to stigmatization as involving being treated in a

reduced way due to possession of a particular characteristic. Boyce *et al* refer to Stangor and Crandall (2000) who state that stigmatization can be the result of one or more parties perceiving a threat from the presence of another party. Temporary employees potentially can represent a threat to the permanent workforce as they recognise that the organization that they work for is not entirely reliant on permanent staff, causing a perceived threat to job security (Boyce *et al*, 2007). Similarly to Chakraborty and Chakravarti's (2019) reference to temporary workers' perception of possible exploitation, being subject to stigmatization on the basis of the contractual relationship with their workplace is far removed from the possibility of experiencing psychological safety. This further strengthens the assertion that this is an area worthy of research.

Conclusion

The literature review provided the opportunity to learn about psychological safety from a number of angles. It is evident, from this review, that this construct is impactful in a number of different areas and ways. In an attempt to clarify what psychological safety actually is, this review commenced with a review of how psychological safety has been defined and from this it became clear that there is no dissent in the literature with regards to its definition. As discussed in the initial stages of this review, it is commonly defined as feeling confident about expressing opinions and suggestions without fear of penalties or negative impact on an interpersonal level. A look at the roots of psychological safety showed that it was identified as a crucial component in organizational change, learning and experimentation. It was found to be impactful in the success of established business processes such as Just-In-Time Production. This helps to show that process-driven environments can be affected by psychological safety and encourages us to look at this concept from different perspectives. Critically, the literature gives strong indications of the role played by psychological safety in enabling organizations, not only to adjust, but to thrive in an unpredictable world of business through collaboration and knowledge sharing between employees.

Also, the constructs of employee voice and employee engagement, have been explored in this review, first separately in the context of their own contribution to

organizational success and then in terms of their relationship with psychological safety. Employee engagement is solidly established as being an important part of organizational advancement and a number of studies, discussed in this review, have illustrated how psychological safety leads to a higher level of engagement in workforces. Employee voice represents the feedback that employees can provide to enhance organizational performance but this is often subject to employee perception of whether the information is likely to be received in a negative or positive way by those in positions of power. The relationship between psychological safety and employee voice has also been demonstrated in various studies. It is clear from the review of the literature that employees are now recognized as assets which are integral to the progression of organizations.

A review of the wider climate in relation to employment in the literature points to an increase in the employment of staff on temporary contracts by organizations. It has been established in this review that although temporary employment is not without advantages, both at an organizational and individual level, it also can pose significant challenges to the employee. These challenges include but are not limited to job insecurity and decreased job satisfaction.

The material presented in this review serves to inform the consideration as to how the recognition of the importance of employee input co-exists with the growing presence of temporary employment. In light of the challenges encountered by temporary employees referred to in the literature, the question is formed as to whether or not temporary employees experience different levels of engagement, use of voice and psychological safety specifically in comparison to that of permanent employees. The implications of this should be considered from an employee and organizational perspective.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and outline the process selected to carry out this research. An overview of the philosophical stance is provided as well as a rationale for the overall approach of the research.

Research Method

Quantitative and qualitative research methods both present strengths and limitations on either side (Choi, 2014). The chosen method to undertake this research is quantitative. One of the reasons that this method was selected is to allow use of a larger population size in order to enable the findings to be generalized. A comparison with qualitative research shows that a potential disadvantage is that application of results of qualitative research to wider populations is relatively weak due to lack of rigorous statistical analysis (Atieno, 2009). The literature review has played a significant role in the choice of research method as is often the case with quantitative research. This research is deductive in nature therefore its aim is to test a theory which is based on the review of the literature as opposed to the qualitative approach of creating a theory (Opoko *et al*, 2016). Many of the studies that were assessed in the literature review also used the quantitative research method and this supports the assertion that this method has a high level of suitability for this research. This allows the researcher to leverage methods which have been previously tested for validity and reliability. Objectivity is a strength of the quantitative method as the researcher is at a distance from the participants and therefore the potential subjectivity on the part of the researcher is significantly reduced (Opoku *et al*, 2016). This is in contrast to qualitative research and further cemented the decision to choose a quantitative approach. Items presented in the questionnaire associated with this research give strong indications

of phenomena associated more with qualitative research such as feelings and experiences but the quantitative approach allows numeric expression of this. Although participants in this piece of research are not afforded the opportunity to describe their experiences in their own words, the likert scale used in the questionnaire allows for selection of descriptions which most closely matches their experiences. Inferential statistics are an effective way to understand the relationships between different characteristics (Barnes and Lewin, 2005) and gain meaningful insight from data. The use of the quantitative method will enable an inferential approach and an opportunity to understand what the data may mean for temporary employees in general. Using a statistically robust approach, this method will allow the researcher to indicate if there is a potential relationship between the constructs of psychological safety, employee engagement, employee voice and temporary employment as distinct from that of permanent employment.

Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is a significant determinant in research as it influences the researcher's selection of methodology. This study follows the epistemological perspective of positivism. Epistemology is essentially the philosophical theory of knowledge (Hetherington, 2018). Positivism takes a scientific standpoint to research and is concerned with producing findings that can be generalized to wider populations. It seeks to produces unbiased results (Mathotaarachchi and Thilakarathna, 2021). The purpose of this research is to systematically produce results using objective analysis with the aim of broadening an understanding of a subset of the working population. This endeavour is thus supported by the objective nature of the philosophy of positivism. Researchers taking a positivist stance generally use quantitative research as their research method and their positioning is empirical in nature (Zyphur and Pierides, 2020). The epistemological opposite to positivism is interpretivism which emphasises the unique and individual experiences of research participants. Within the interpretivist approach, precedence is given to the subjectivity of the participants' views (Gillani, 2021) and the researcher is involved directly with the research participants with the context of the subject's experience being key to the development of the theory. This was deemed unsuitable

for the objectives of this particular research as the purpose was to statistically test a theory. A researcher adapting a positivist philosophy has very limited communication with participants and is predominantly concerned with the data produced in the study. Objectivity and measurability are key features of positivism with the researcher assuming a position of detachment from the outcome of the research (Saunders, 2019). The personal values of the researcher have no influential capacity in the process which strengthens the argument to adopt this approach in this particular research.

Sample

Sampling is used in research to represent a population that is larger than that which the researcher has the means to gain access to. Access to a very large population may be very expensive or simply not practical for the researcher. The theory of sampling is that the sample or subgroup will be representative of the population which the researcher is investigating (Aggarwal, 2011). The sampling used in this research belongs to the category of non-probability sampling and within that, can be further categorized as convenience sampling. With the use of non-probability sampling, a significantly large number of members of the target population will not be included because the researcher will not have the resources to recruit them. Probability sampling would give each member of the target population an equal chance of being nominated to participate and this would allow the results to be generalised to the general population (Acharya *et al*, 2013). However, this research will allow tentative inferences about the sample population to be made based on the demographic information collected. The researcher is conscious of the risk of bias when opting to use non-probability sampling. This is due to the fact that members of the target population have a greater chance of being selected due to the fact that the researcher has a greater chance of accessing them. In this research, colleagues and professional acquaintances of the researcher were among selected participants and it is acknowledged that this leaves the research open to potential selection bias.

This research was not specifically confined to any one particular industry as the key focus was on the employment terms of the participants and as a result, individuals were targeted based on whether they were in temporary or permanent employment.

The population was selected as a result of the researcher's access to them and included a mixture of current and historic professional contacts. Participants were asked to indicate which industry they were employed in and length of time in their current organization in order to provide some background. In total, 26 temporarily employed and 29 permanently employed participants completed the questionnaire.

Data Collection instrument

The instrument used in this research was a questionnaire with closed ended questions. The respondent could only select one answer from a list of options. It was important to ensure mutual exclusivity of the responses to avoid ambiguity and to gain specific data in line with the scientific approach of this research. The questionnaire was administered via email link to the participants with the use of Google Forms. The results were completely anonymous and the questionnaire stated this at the outset. It has been noted that anonymity is a key influencer in an individual's decision to participate in a questionnaire (Michaelidou and Dibb, 2006). Arguably, a questionnaire regarding a subject related to workplace experiences is one that respondents would be more comfortable to answer anonymously. The rationale for the research and a brief explanation of psychological safety, employee engagement and employee voice was included at the beginning of the questionnaire in order to create a platform for the research and to ensure that the respondents were presented with a solid explanation of its purpose.

Measures

The items selected for use in the questionnaire emerged as a result of the literature review. The researcher opted to use previously utilised questionnaires for reasons of efficiency, validity and reliability. It is vital to have an appropriately designed questionnaire in order to acquire valid data and a review of existing questionnaires is helpful in this regard (Setia *et al*, 2017). A key advantage of using existing questionnaires is that they are likely to have been subjected to robust testing at the time of their inception and this helps to provide confidence that the questions address the concepts under review (Hyman *et al*, 2006). Reliability and validity are

important features in the design of questionnaires. Reliability shows how consistent participants' responses are throughout a questionnaire whilst validity is an indicator of whether the questions are suitable for measuring the concept being researched (Taherdoost, 2016). However, researchers electing to use existing questionnaires must be aware of the possibility of the measures not being reliable. The likert scale was applied to all of the sections in this questionnaire. SPSS was used to carry out the statistical analysis. A brief overview of the items in the questionnaire follows. (**Appendix A** contains a full outline of the questions)

Psychological safety

Psychological safety was measured utilizing items from Amy Edmondson's scale (Edmondson, 1999). There were seven items in total in this section. Items included statements such as 'People at this organization are able to bring up problems and tough issues', 'I feel it is safe to take a risk in this organization' and 'If I make a mistake at this organization, it is often held against me'. Respondents were given five options from which to choose one (1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree). A review of this research shows that these items underwent a thorough testing by Edmondson through discriminant validity which demonstrates that two variables that should not be related to each other are not related (Taderhoost, 2016). Also, the items were subjected by Edmondson to the test of internal consistency and reliability using Cronbach's Alpha. Cronbach's Alpha is a commonly used test to establish the consistency of responses in a questionnaire. A score of 0.70 or above is considered acceptable (Inal *et al*, 2017). A result of .645 was obtained when Cronbach's Alpha was carried out on the items of this scale.

Employee Engagement

The measurement of employee engagement was divided into three different subsections: emotional engagement; cognitive engagement and behavioural engagement. The items were adopted from a previously deployed study by Shuck *et al* (2017).

Items within emotional engagement included 'I feel a strong sense of belonging to my job', 'I care about the future of the company that I work for' and 'Work has a great deal of personal meaning to me'. Cognitive engagement measures included 'I give my job responsibility a lot of attention' and 'I concentrate on my job when I am at work'. The behavioural engagement section requested respondents indicate their experience of items such as 'I really push myself to work beyond what is expected of me' and 'I am willing to put in extra effort without being asked'. All of the three categories within this section were previously tested using Chronbach's Alpha for internal consistency and were also tested for validity. A result of .872 was obtained when Cronbach's Alpha was carried out on the items of this scale.

Employee Voice

Employee voice was measured with the use of a scale produced by Van Dyne *et al* (1998) and included items such as 'I communicate my opinions about work to others even if my opinion is different to that of others and they disagree with me' and 'I speak up in this organization with ideas for new projects or change in procedures'. The items in this research also were subjected to appropriate tests by Van Dyne. A result of .830 was obtained when Cronbach's Alpha was carried out on the items of this scale.

Additional Information

Participants were given questions regarding the length of time at their current organization and the industry in which they work was also included to give a more detailed picture of the sample population. All respondents were requested to indicate if they were in permanent or temporary/contract employment.

Ethical Considerations

This research has been conducted with ethics as a primary consideration. All respondents have participated with informed consent in this research and a guarantee of complete anonymity to all participants has been given the by researcher. The survey endeavoured to provide a clear outline of the purpose of the research. All participation by the respondents was entirely voluntary. The right on the part of respondents to withdraw from the process at any point was observed by the researcher.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Descriptive Statistics

The data in this study is drawn from a population of 55 respondents (n = 55). The population is primarily differentiated by their employment status. The number of respondents in temporary employment was 26 (n = 26) and a total of 29 respondent were in permanent employment (n = 29). The questionnaire sought additional data in terms of length of time in their current organization as well as the industry in which the respondents were employed. At the time of replying to the questionnaire, the industry breakdown across both groups was as follows: 43.6% (n = 24) were employed in the pharmaceutical industry; 29.1% (n = 16) selected the "other" category; 7.27% (n = 4) were in the Public Sector; 7.27% (n = 4) were in Banking; 5.45 % (n = 3) were in Information Technology 3.63% (n = 2) were in the Education sector and 3.63% (n = 2) were in the Hospitality industry. Specification with regards to the "other" category was not requested.

The breakdown of length of time in current roles is as follows: 32.7% (n = 18) selected 2 – 4 years; 29.1% (n = 16) selected 0 – 1 years; 18.2% (n = 10) selected 10+ years; 12.7% (n = 7) selected 5 – 7 years and 7.27% (n = 4) selected 8 – 10 years. An overview of the descriptive statistics and frequency is provided in Table (s) 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1:

	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation
Psychological Safety	55	19.00	23.4000	3.60350
Employee Voice	55	17.00	15.8364	3.76024
Employee Engagement Total	55	37.00	46.2182	6.29135
Cognitive Engagement (subcale of employee eng**.)**	55	16.00	16.2909	2.58681
Emotional Engagement (subcale of employee of eng.)	55	12.00	14.9455	2.72450
Behavioural Engagement (subcale of employee eng.)	55	11.00	14.9818	2.71819

Frequency

Table 2:

Employment Status

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Permanent	29	52.7	52.7	52.7
Temporary/Contract	26	47.3	47.3	100.0
Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Table 3:

Industry

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Pharmaceutical	24	43.6	43.6	43.6
Other	16	29.1	29.1	72.7
Information Technology	3	5.5	5.5	78.2
Banking	5	9.1	9.1	87.3
Hospitality	2	3.6	3.6	90.9
Public Sector	4	7.3	7.3	98.2
Education	1	1.8	1.8	100.0
Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Table 4:

Length of time at current organization

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
0 - 1 years	15	27.3	27.3	27.3
2 - 4 years	19	34.5	34.5	61.8
5 - 7 years	7	12.7	12.7	74.5
8 - 10 years	4	7.3	7.3	81.8
10+ years	10	18.2	18.2	100.0
Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Inferential Statistics

The Shapiro Wilks test was carried out in order to ascertain whether the scale variables were normally distributed in order to choose the appropriate test. The results showed that psychological safety and employee voice were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$) whilst employee engagement was not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$). The normally distributed data was tested using the independent samples t-test whilst the Mann Whitney U-test was carried out on the variables with non-normally distributed data.

Psychological Safety

Do temporary employees experience differing levels of psychological safety in comparison to that of permanent employees?

An independent samples t-test was completed in order to determine if temporary employees experienced differing levels of psychological safety in comparison to permanent employees. The results of this test suggest there is no evidence of differing levels of psychological safety between temporary employees (M=23.73, SD=4.07) and permanent employees (M=23.10, SD=3.16), t=-.641, df=53, p=.524.

Employee Engagement

Do temporary employees report that they are more or less engaged in comparison to that of permanent employees?

A Mann-Whitney U-test was carried out in order to assess if temporary employees report differences in levels of employee engagement in comparison to that of permanent employees. The mean was used (as opposed to the median) as the shapes of the distribution of the variables differed. The test was used to compare overall employee engagement as well as the subscales of cognitive engagement, emotional engagement and behavioural engagement.

The overall engagement score indicates that, in this sample population, there is a difference between temporary (mean rank=22.15) and permanent employees (mean rank=33.24), p=.010.

Employee engagement subscales:

The test for the subscale of *behavioural engagement* indicates that there is a difference between temporary (mean rank = 22.40) and permanent employees (mean rank = 33.02), p=.013. The results for *cognitive engagement* suggest that there is no difference between the groups (temporary mean rank = 26.13,

permanent mean rank = 29.67, p=.401). The test for *emotional engagement* scores indicate no differences in levels (temporary mean rank = 23.63 and permanent mean rank = 31.91, p=.052).

Employee Voice

Do Temporary employees experience differences in the degree to which they express voice in comparison to that of permanent employees?

An independent t-test was used to establish if temporary employees reported differences in the level at which they express voice in comparison to that of permanent employees. The results indicate that there is a difference between the two groups (temporary; M = 14.61, SD = 4.26, permanent; M = 16.93, SD = 2.90), p = .025.

In addition, a Spearman's rank correlation test indicated a relationship between psychological safety and employee engagement (p = .002). No significant relationship was detected between psychological safety and employee voice (p = .119).

Summary

The statistical tests carried out on this data have produced both unexpected and expected results. The result regarding psychological safety show no indication of a difference between temporary and permanent employees. This is in contrast to the results of employee engagement and employee voice which did show evidence of a difference between the two groups. The subscales for employee engagement produced varied results. These results and their various implications for organizations and further research are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter seeks to explore the potential implications resulting from the statistical analysis conducted on the results of this research as well as aiming to explore future avenues of research.

Hypothesis 1: *Temporary employees will experience a difference in levels of psychological safety in comparison to that of permanent employees.*

This hypothesis was examined using an independent t-test. The results for this particular population did not produce any evidence that temporary employees will experience differing levels of psychological safety. The result was non-significant. In light of the literature reviewed in this research detailing the difficulties that can accompany temporary employment, this result was not expected. Nonetheless, this is an interesting finding and presents additional indicators for future research. Additional research could perhaps acquire more detailed information regarding the respondents than was requested in this study. It would be beneficial to contemplate different aspects of the respondents' employment position to ascertain what other factors may play a role in levels of psychological safety in temporary employees. For example, in relation to employment status, respondents in this study were solely requested to indicate if they were in temporary or permanent employment. Other factors relating to employment such as level of responsibility and rank within their respective organizations were not included. Arguably these are elements of an individual's employment that can affect their experiences as employees and cannot be ruled out as impactful in the area of psychological safety. Investigating if the level of power and responsibility that a temporary worker has impacts their level of psychological safety was beyond this specific piece of work but could form a valuable part of future studies. Also, choice of employment type was not factored into the study. An individual may choose temporary employment over permanent employment. For example, studies have shown that employees who voluntary select temporary employment report higher levels of job satisfaction than those who

have little or no choice (Parker *et al*, 2002). Again, this research did not seek to probe the area of choice or lack thereof in relation to the possibility of a relationship with psychological safety in temporary employees but the area of choice provides grounds for additional study. The possibility is acknowledged that there are a range of additional factors that may have had an impact on the result of this part of the research that were not within the scope of this particular study. However, this presents substantial material to form the basis for further investigation in this area.

Hypothesis 2: *Temporary employees will have different levels of employee engagement in comparison to that of permanent employees.*

A Mann-Whitney U-test was used to test this hypothesis. This scale was analysed at an overall level and also at the subscale levels of cognitive engagement, behavioural engagement and emotional engagement. At an overall level the results indicate that, in support of the hypothesis, there is a difference in the levels of engagement between temporary and permanent employees that took part in this survey with temporary employees reporting engagement to a lesser degree. This result was anticipated as a consequence of the aspects of temporary employment referred to in the literature. As explored in Chapter 2, the literature asserts that employee engagement has become progressively more important in helping an organization reach its goals and achieve competitive advantage (Harshitha, 2015). Therefore, if we extrapolate this result to the wider working population, the implication is that this could be a problematic area for employers as the strategic hiring of temporary workers has increased. This supports the case that employers need to integrate specific considerations regarding temporary employees into employee engagement programmes.

The test for the subscales of employee engagement produced varying results between the two groups. The tests carried out on the subscales of cognitive engagement and emotional engagement suggested that there is no difference between temporary and permanent employees in respect of these constructs. Cognitive engagement refers to an employee's level of concentration and commitment while they are carrying out their professional duties (Khan, 1990). The test indicates that employment status has no bearing on this. The same applies to

emotional engagement although it is noted that this result only minimally exceeded the level of significance. Emotional engagement was measured using items which address an employee's depth of belief in the mission of the organization they are working for and their level of interest in the future of the company, amongst others. The results of the test on behavioural engagement indicated a difference between the two groups with temporary employees reporting lower levels of behavioural engagement. Behavioural engagement was measured using items which indicated an employee's willingness to go beyond prescribed duties in order to support their team and organization. It is noteworthy that the result of this construct varied in comparison to cognitive and emotional engagement. Given that behavioural engagement is a feature of employee engagement that would see an employee extend themselves beyond the tasks of their job description, this is also a critical area of consideration for employers. The questions regarding behavioural engagement were centred on unrequested work-related efforts on the part of the employee. To that end, an area worthy of consideration is the factors that may have an impact in this area. For example, could different remuneration practices between permanent and temporary employees have an impact on behavioural engagement and willingness to "go the extra mile" or are there are other influencing factors. Also, worthy of exploration is the relationship between the three variables of emotional, cognitive and behavioural engagement. Given that the results for behavioural engagement differed from cognitive and emotional engagement, it justifies further investigation to ascertain if these elements interlock differently for temporary employees in comparison to permanent employees.

In analysing these results it is important to remain aware that employee engagement is a broad area and that there are potentially influencing factors which were not within the scope of this study. For example, the literature states that individual personality can play a role in an employee's level of engagement (Barreiro and Treglown, 2020). High levels of individual characteristics such as agreeableness, extraversion and conscientiousness have been shown to be predictive of employee engagement (Meenakshi and Aastha, 2014). Although the influence of personality on employee engagement was not under examination in this research, future research should consider if personality traits coincide with a temporary employee's level of engagement.

Psychological Safety and Employee Engagement

Several studies which were discussed in the literature review indicate a relationship between psychological safety and employee engagement. As referred to above, this research found that temporary employees did not report different levels of psychological safety in comparison to permanent employees. On the basis of the literature review, it was anticipated that the results of H2 (employee engagement) would resonate with the results of H1 (psychological safety). That is to say that if the results concerning psychological safety did not indicate a difference between temporary and permanent employees then the same outcome would be expected with regards to employee engagement. Although the hypothesis regarding employee engagement was supported overall, the result differs to that of H1 and therefore, specifically in respect of psychological safety, this has produced an unexpected result. This result is in contrast to the studies of May (2004) and Ariani (2015) which both found a link between psychological safety and employee engagement. However, both the studies of May and Ariani were structured differently to this piece of research in that they both tested larger populations and also sought to directly test the relationship between psychological safety and employee engagement.

Hypothesis 3: *Temporary employees will experience differences in the degree to which they express employee voice in comparison to that of permanent employees.*

An independent t-test was used to test this hypothesis. The results signal that there is a difference between the two groups, therefore the hypothesis with regard to this variable is supported. Temporary employees scored lower in their levels of expression of employee voice than permanent employees, demonstrating that the temporary employees that took part in this study are less inclined to use their voice. This is in accordance with the study by Xiaoye *et al* (2020) referenced in the literature review in which it was indicated that temporary employees reported a lower level of expression of promotive voice than permanent employees (this

research did not distinguish between promotive and prohibitive voice). As referred to in the literature review, it has been established that employee voice is widely

considered to be a key component in organizational success (Chamberlin *et al*, 2017). It can be proposed that this result, if generalized to the wider working population, suggests that there are implications for organizations that engage or are considering engaging temporary staff as part of their workforce. The items in this scale were related to, amongst others, employee willingness to express opinions that may differ to those of others and also, speaking up with ideas for change in processes and procedures. These would arguably be positive actions for the organization in that the employee is offering their own insight and considerations to the organization. It has also been noted in the literature that the employee expression of prohibitive and promotive voice presents valuable opportunities for the management teams of organizations to build relationships with their staff as well as capitalize on new ideas for innovation (Wilkinson *et al*, 2020). With an increase in temporary employment observed in the literature review, this result is significant from both a management and employee perspective. It is arguable that the consequences of reticence in expressing viewpoints and ideas could contribute to a dearth in employee communication as well as inhibiting the offering from temporary employees of fresh perspectives. It is conceivable that temporary contractors, for example, will have gained exposure to different workplace cultures and diverse processes. Therefore their reluctance to use their voice represents the potential for employers to miss opportunities to learn from the accumulated experience of their temporary personnel. Future research could explore the impact on the overall workplace experience that withholding expression and refraining from providing input could have on temporary employees.

It is has been noted already, in light of the specific findings in this research, that organizations could miss the opportunity to benefit from the input of temporary employees. However, this piece of research was conducted utilizing employee input. It is therefore suggested that further research is required to understand the extent to which management teams are cognizant of the various challenges faced by temporary employees, such as those that are outlined in the literature and also to ascertain the level of awareness among senior managers of the concept of employee voice, specifically with respect to temporary staff. Other potentially

influential elements were beyond the remit of this study such as the effect of the individual's personality on their propensity to be forthcoming with ideas, concerns and suggestions. Wijaya (2021) refers to a proactive personality disposition that dictates the extent to which the individual will take steps to influence their professional environment, stating that proactive personalities are more likely to display voice behaviour as a means to influence their environment. Further research in the area of employee voice in respect of temporary employment should take the disposition of the individual personality into account.

Psychological Safety and Employee Voice

The literature presented several studies which showed a relationship between employee voice and psychological safety. This research found the results for temporary employees did not indicate a different experience of psychological safety in comparison to permanent employees. In the context of studies referred to in the literature review which found that psychological safety has a contributory effect to employee voice, it was expected that the results of H3 (employee voice) would mirror that of H1 (psychological safety). Although the hypothesis with regards to employee voice has been supported, the outcome is not expected as a result of previous studies in relation to psychological safety and employee voice. The studies of Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009) and Ge (2020) established that psychological safety plays a positive role in the promotion of employee voice. However, the Walumbwa and Schaubroeck study tested a significantly larger population (1,116 employees) than this piece of research and directly tested the relationship between employee voice and psychological safety as did the study of Ge.

Limitations of the Study

Various limitations must be acknowledged in relation to this research. The size of the sample population was relatively small and despite using suitable statistical tests, one must remain aware of the impact that this could have had on the final results in terms of difficulty in applying the results to a broader population and also potential difficulty in detecting an effect. Also, this research was carried out using a cross-sectional study design which captures data at one point in time so any

changes that developed for the respondents after the completion of survey in respect of the measures would not be encompassed in this research. Additionally, the survey associated with this research was self-reporting which leaves the research open to the potential of bias in that respondents can select a response based on their own preference as opposed to a response that would more accurately describe their experience.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of the Research

This research commenced with a query as to the relationship between levels of psychological safety and temporary employees. It was discovered that this is an area that research has not tapped into to an adequate level and in fact has been largely overlooked. Further research by the author uncovered literature which indicated a positive relationship between psychological safety and both employee engagement and employee voice, leading to the additional research questions concerning these two subjects and the contractual arrangement of temporary employment. This was an also angle that had not been probed in the research to a sufficient degree. A deeper look at the current condition of the labour market in relation to temporary employment signalled the possibility that this contractual arrangement has multiple benefits for employers but less so for employees in many respects. The necessity to have an engaged and collaborative workforce in an unpredictable business environment was also noted from the literature in the preparation of this study. Organizations are increasingly dependent upon intangible aspects of their operations such as knowledge sharing, creativity and the interpersonal communication of their staff (Omerzel and Gulev, 2011). This was considered important by the author from a business and employee experience perspective. The need for an engaged workforce combined with an ongoing trend to procure staff on a temporary basis provided a footing for this research and it is asserted here that it also provides fertile ground for future research.

Recommendations for future research

Following a review of the results, a number of pathways for research and considerations have been identified for each of the three questions that formed the basis of this research:

1. Do temporary employees experience differing levels of psychological safety in comparison to that of permanent employees?
2. Do temporary employees report that they are more or less engaged than permanent employees?
3. Do Temporary employees experience differences in the degree to which they express invoice in comparison to that of permanent employees?

Having completed this piece of research, the author remains of the opinion that the area of temporary employment with respect to psychological safety, employee voice and employee engagement requires and is worthy of further research. As stated above, these constructs have gone largely unexamined in the research with respect to temporary employment. This creates a vacuum of knowledge in an area that is arguably becoming increasingly important in a world that continues to experience a high degree of change.

The questions posed in this research regarding psychological safety, employee engagement, employee voice and temporary employment require additional examination perhaps with a larger population. A longitudinal design would also be beneficial so that changes over time in the level of these constructs can be analysed. This research has taken a multi-industry approach and additional research should take the same perspective in order to advance an inclusive and 'helicopter' view of the relationship between these constructs in respect of temporary employees.

There are also an additional number of angles from which to investigate this relationship. As mentioned in the discussion chapter of this work, there are a number of different facets of employment that could be included in future research such as the level of responsibility that a temporary employee has and thus a potentially increased level of power within the organization. Further studies could seek to understand if this has a bearing on levels of psychological safety. The same also applies to the level of knowledge and expertise that a temporary employee holds within their area of work. A question for consideration in this regard is if this impacts their level of power and their subsequent levels of psychological safety.

The areas of employee engagement and employee voice also require further analysis in connection with temporary employment. Studies are required to gauge the relationship between these constructs and temporary employment, ideally with a larger population sample than the resources that this particular research were able to accommodate and also with the same inclusivity of diverse industries that this particular research encompassed. As referred to in Chapter 5, personality has been identified as an influencing factor in employee engagement and employee voice (Barreiro and Treglown, 2020; Handa and Gulati, 2014; Wijaya 2021). Future studies should consider if personality has an impact on the experience of temporary employees with regards to their level of engagement and inclination to voice opinions.

Furthermore, research in this area should be extended to include and/or focus on the employer perspective and their level of awareness of psychological safety, employee engagement and employee voice explicitly in the recruitment of temporary staff. As discussed throughout this research, this is critical from the perspective of gaining the valuable input of all employees and creating a rewarding and psychologically safe environment that is rich in collaboration and openness for all staff. This is also important from the standpoint of various initiatives such as employee engagement programmes and internal communications. Similarly, engagement of all staff should be considered from the reputational angle of organizations as this is critical in attracting and retaining talented employees. Companies rely on their employees to be organizational ambassadors and to spread the word regarding their strengths and desirability as employers. Employees that are strongly engaged are more likely to speak favourably about their employer online and recommend them to potential candidates (Clayton, 2018). Although it is priority to create a psychologically safe environment that promotes employee engagement and wellbeing for all staff, temporary employees must also be recognized as valuable ambassadors for the organization. In consideration of this, it behoves employers to ensure that temporary employees have a fruitful and productive workplace experience.

Management teams must also consider temporary employees in the context of Covid-19. As a result of the occurrence of Covid-19, organizational priorities have shifted which has impacted the agreements between employers and employees

(Lopez-Cabrales and DeNisi, 2021). Future inquiry should incorporate consideration as to how organizational adjustment to Covid-19 has an impact on psychological safety, employee voice and employee engagement in temporary staff.

APPENDICES

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Appendix A

Psychological Safety

1. People at this organization are able to bring up problems and tough issues.
2. I feel it is safe to take a risk in this organization.
3. It is difficult to ask other members of this organization for help.
4. No one at this organization would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.
5. Working with members of this organization, my unique skills and talent are valued and utlized.
6. If I make a mistake at this organization, it is often held against me.
7. People at this oganzation often reject others for being different.

Employee engagement

Cognitive engagement

1. I am really focused when I am working.
2. I concentrate on my job when I am at work.
3. I give my job responsibility a lot of attention.
4. At work, I am focused on my job.

Emotional engagement

1. Working here has a great deal of personal meaning to me.
2. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my job.
3. I believe in the mission and purpose of the company that I work at.
4. I care about the future of the company that I work for at.

Behavioural engagement

1. I really push myself to work beyond what is expected of me.
2. I am willing to put in extra effort without being asked.
3. I often go above what is expected of me to help my team be successful.
4. I work harder than expected to help the company I work in be successful.

Employee voice

1. I speak up in this organization with ideas for new projects or change in procedures.
2. I get involved in issues that affect the quality of work in this organization.
3. I develop and make recommendations concerning issues that affect this organization.
4. I communicate my opinions about work to others even if my opinion is different to that of others and they disagree with me.
5. I keep informed about issues where my opinion might be useful to this organization.

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