

Linking perceptions of organizational support to temporary agency workers' well-being

The mediation of motivations

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Abstract

Purpose – This research focused on agency work. Previous studies highlighted the importance of motivations to understand workers' attitudes, behaviors and well-being. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the contribution of perceptions of support from organizations to autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment, the relationship of motivations with workers' well-being and the mediating role of motivations between perceptions of organizational support (POS) and workers' well-being.

Design/methodology/approach – The hypotheses were tested with a sample of 3,983 temporary agency workers and using structural equation modeling.

Findings – The authors verified that POS from the agency contributed to both autonomous motivation and controlled motivation for temporary agency employment, whereas POS from the client company only contributed to autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment. Moreover, autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment was positively associated with workers' well-being. Contrary to expectations, controlled motivation for temporary agency employment was not significantly associated with workers' well-being. As predicted, autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment was a mediator in the relationship between POS and workers' well-being.

Research limitations/implications – The study relies on self-reported data, and it does not have a longitudinal design.

Practical implications – An important implication of this research study is that organizations, through the support provided to the workers, may contribute positively to increase workers' autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment, and, in turn, more autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment relates to higher levels of workers' well-being.

Originality/value – The study innovates by including in the same model variables that may contribute to workers' motivation for temporary agency employment as well as the outcomes that may arise from workers' motivation for temporary agency employment.

Keywords Motivations, Self-determination theory, Well-being, Perceived organizational support, Temporary agency workers, Work engagement, Burnout

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

Today in the same company and for the same professional category, it is possible to find workers with different legal contracts: whereas some workers are directly hired by the companies for whom they perform their job, other workers are legally employed by intermediaries such as temporary work agencies (De Cuyper *et al.*, 2008). In the latter case, workers are engaged in a triangular employment relationship where the worker is an employee of the temporary work agency (i.e. the legal employer) but works at the location of the client company (De Cuyper *et al.*, 2008).

In recent years, the need to analyze temporary agency workers (TAWs) has taken on greater relevance due to the increasing number of individuals in this employment arrangement (CIETT, 2016). In Portugal, the context of this study, the proportion of TAWs in the labor market doubled between 1996 and 2012 – from 0.6 per cent to 1.7 per cent – and is almost on par with the average penetration rate globally registered in Europe of 1.8 per cent (CIETT, 2016). Moreover, contingent work is frequently associated with lower job security and workers' benefits (Chambel *et al.*, 2015b). Consequently, to attenuate these deleterious characteristics, the support provided by organizations may assume a higher relevance for contingent workers (Chambel *et al.*, 2015b). Bearing this in mind, with the current study we aim to analyze whether perceptions of support from organizations contribute to autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment. Previous studies have demonstrated that TAW develops two foci of perceptions of organizational support (POS) – one regarding the client company and one regarding the temporary work agency (Giunchi *et al.*, 2015). Thus, special attention should be given to understand how these two foci of perceptions are related to autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment. The empirical evidence regarding the relationship between POS and autonomous motivation remains scarce (Gillet *et al.*, 2013a). Moreover, to our knowledge, there are no studies analyzing this relationship with TAWs.

The increasing use of contingent work – such as the temporary agency work – also leads researchers and practitioners to concern themselves with the repercussions of this job to the workers' attitudes, behaviors and well-being (De Cuyper *et al.*, 2008). The study of TAW motivations for this employment was found as being of great relevance to understanding these workers' outcomes (Lopes and Chambel, 2017). More precisely, previous studies, using the theoretical framework of the self-determination theory (SDT; Deci and Ryan, 2000), have already shown that the quality of workers motivation – i.e. the nature of motivation autonomous/self-determined or controlled – is important to explain the workers' attitudes, behaviors and well-being (Gagné and Westbye, 2015). As such, autonomous motivation should lead to more positive outcomes, and controlled motivations should predict more negative ones (Gillet *et al.*, 2013b). Recognizing the importance of studying workers' motivations, the present study innovates by including in the same model variables that may contribute to the TAW motivations – i.e. POS from the agency and POS from the client company – as well as the outcomes that may arise from TAW motivations – i.e. work engagement and burnout. As Gillet *et al.* (2013a) noted, to date, few studies in the work domain have included both determinants (e.g. POS) and consequences (e.g. well-being) of workers' motivation. Therefore, by analyzing specifically TAW, the current research will contribute to give more insights into the subject by observing whether the results we found are in line with the existing literature.

The relationship between POS and autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment

When someone is involved in a specific task or action, he/she may have different reasons for doing so (Ryan and Deci, 2000). According to the SDT, these different reasons can be

displayed in a motivational continuum that ranges from amotivation to intrinsic motivation. Amotivation is the state of lacking the intention to act (Ryan and Deci, 2000), and therefore in an organizational context, there is no interest in studying it (Gagné *et al.*, 2010). Intrinsic motivation represents behavior that is fully based on self-determination (Nie *et al.*, 2015). When individuals are intrinsically motivated, they do an activity for its inherent satisfaction, which is highly autonomous and does not depend on external contingencies (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

In between amotivation and intrinsic motivation, four types of extrinsic motivation are arranged to vary in degrees of self-determination (Ryan and Deci, 2000). These four types of extrinsic motivations are seen as motivations that better reflect the reasons why TAWs opt for or maintain their employment arrangement (De Jong and Schalk, 2010), and they can be conceptualized as follows:

- integrated motivation, which consists of an extrinsic type of motivation with a more autonomous nature and represents individuals who accept their employment arrangement because it is actually the type of employment that better fits their personal needs or commitments (e.g., school, family) or that better provides the flexibility they need;
- identified motivation, which encapsulates an autonomous nature and represents a recognition of the value of work toward achieving personal objectives such as developing skills that will be helpful in the future or gaining permanent work – i.e. stepping-stone motives;
- introjected motivation, which represents a controlled reason for behaving toward avoiding a personal feeling of guilt or shame or gaining self-worth (pride), which leads individuals to a sense of failure or inability to find a job; and
- finally, external motivation that consists of a highly controlled form of motivation wherein individuals work because the job is viewed either as a way to “survive” or as a way to earn an income.

The SDT argues that the reasons described above can be grouped into two broad key forms of human motivation: autonomous and controlled (Deci and Ryan, 2008). Autonomous motivation is experienced as emerging from one’s self and the individual behaves with a full sense of volition, freedom and choice. Controlled motivation involves an experience of pressure and control to engage in a specific course of action (Deci and Ryan, 2008). In the current study, we considered two types of autonomous motivation – i.e. integrated and identified motivation – and two types of controlled motivation – introjected and external motivation. Previous studies have included intrinsic motivation in the key form of autonomous motivation (Fernet *et al.*, 2015). However, because a large proportion of temporary workers have mainly extrinsic reasons to have their job (Fang and MacPhail, 2008), we do not include intrinsic motivation in our analysis. In fact, TAW does not have this employment arrangement for its inherent satisfaction and pleasure (De Jong and Schalk, 2010).

Beyond distinguishing several motivations, one of the major contributions of the SDT is the focus on social-contextual conditions that facilitate versus undermine individuals’ motivations (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In a work context, organizations can influence the workers’ motivation by providing conditions to fulfill the employees’ needs (Chambel *et al.*, 2015a). POS – i.e. workers’ global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986) – can be seen as a highly effective organizational-based resource by helping to fulfill the three basic psychological needs of individuals, namely, relatedness, autonomy and competence

(Chambel *et al.*, 2015a). When the need for relatedness is satisfied, workers regard themselves as being valuable and consider the organization as being committed to the relationship with them (Chambel *et al.*, 2015a). Concerning the need for autonomy, organizational support should satisfy this need by increasing feelings of internal control (Chambel *et al.*, 2015a). The need for competence is satisfied when individuals are encouraged to seek skill-related challenges (Gillet *et al.*, 2011), and when organizational support is perceived by employees, they may also consider the work context to display these characteristics (Chambel *et al.*, 2015a).

Based on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), it is possible to expect that the satisfaction of workers' psychological needs – by the provided organizational support – creates among workers a sense of obligation to reciprocate the positive treatment received from organizations (Baran *et al.*, 2012). This sense of obligation is experienced as a moral imperative that derives from the values and inner convictions of the individuals and, as such, is accompanied by a sense of own volition (Meyer and Parfyonova, 2010). Recently, Skiba and Wildman (2019) found a positive and significant relationship between the need for competence and the need for autonomy and the individuals' sense of obligation. In line with the literature, it can be argued that this sense of obligation may explain why employees feel a duty to reciprocate the favorable treatment received from an organization by showing higher autonomous motivation (Baran *et al.*, 2012). In fact, previous studies with permanent workers and based on the SDT also provide support to the positive relationship between POS and autonomous motivation (Gagné *et al.*, 2010; Gillet *et al.*, 2013b).

Regarding the relationship between POS and controlled motivation (i.e. another broad key form of human motivation that has a contrary nature to autonomous motivation), no link is hypothesized. According to the SDT, POS is posited to facilitate the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, which are strongly related to autonomous motivation but not significantly correlated to controlled motivation (Fernet, 2011).

Concerning the specific case of TAWs, as previously noted, these workers may develop two foci of POS – one regarding the client company and one regarding the temporary work agency (Giunchi *et al.*, 2015). In addition, TAWs are generally motivated to maintain social equilibrium in their employment relationships with both the temporary work agency and with the client company (Giunchi *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, when both the temporary work agency and the client company are responsive to the workers' psychological needs, the support provided by both organizations should contribute to a higher autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment.

Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

- H1.* Both POS from the agency and POS from the client company are positively related to autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment.

The relationship between TAW motivations for temporary agency employment and work well-being

Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) state that workplace well-being should be assessed through work engagement and burnout. Whereas work engagement is a positive dimension of work well-being, burnout is a negative one. Work engagement refers to a cognitive and affective positive mind-set related to work that includes vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). Vigor corresponds to high levels of energy, mental resistance and capacity to invest effort in work. Dedication corresponds to a strong involvement in one's work and a sense of significance, enthusiasm, pride and challenge. Absorption corresponds to full concentration in one's work in a way that the person loses the notion of time. Burnout refers

to a psychological negative state of exhaustion and cynicism (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Exhaustion refers to feelings of being overextended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources. Cynicism refers to a negative, callous or excessively detached response to various aspects of the job.

According to the SDT, a worker who acts with a full sense of volition, freedom and choice (i.e. autonomous motivation) experiences more positive states and has more optimal outcomes than a worker who acts with an experience of pressure and control that comes from forces perceived to be external to the self (i.e. controlled motivation) (Deci and Ryan, 2008). Thus, behavior based on more autonomous motives will foster greater well-being outcomes than controlled motives (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In line with this assumption, empirical studies provided support for a positive relationship between autonomous motivation and work engagement (Chambel *et al.*, 2015a; Haivas *et al.*, 2013). Conversely, other studies found a negative relationship between autonomous motivation and burnout (Chambel *et al.*, 2015a; Fernet *et al.*, 2015). With regard to controlled motivation, some studies also found a negative relationship with positive indicators of well-being at work and observed a positive relationship with negative indicators of well-being at work (Chambel *et al.*, 2015a; Fernet *et al.*, 2015).

Concerning the specific case of TAWs, the empirical evidence about the relationship between motivations for temporary agency employment and work well-being remains scarce. However, using the theoretical framework of the SDT, the study of Lopes and Chambel (2017) with a two-wave design confirmed that autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment has a positive cross-lagged effect on work engagement.

Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H2a.* Autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment is positively related to work engagement.
- H2b.* Autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment is negatively related to burnout.
- H2c.* Controlled motivation for temporary agency employment is negatively related to work engagement
- H2d.* Controlled motivation for temporary agency employment is positively related to burnout.

Double POS and work well-being: the mediation by autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment

The quality of motivation (i.e. autonomous or controlled motivation) can be seen as a process that links contextual factors of the work environment to a variety of work outcomes, such as well-being/ill-being variables (Deci *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, it is possible to expect that POS – a contextual variable – has an indirect effect on workers' well-being in such a way that POS is positively associated with autonomous motivation (Gagné *et al.*, 2010), and autonomous motivation is positively associated with work well-being (Chambel *et al.*, 2015a).

Beyond the existence of an indirect effect, a direct effect of POS on work well-being is also highly supported in the literature (Baran *et al.*, 2012). This direct effect can be justified because social support is a significant factor for workers' adaptation to job demands and, consequently, helps to reduce occupational strain and to enhance employees' well-being (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). As already mentioned, POS contributes to meet the needs of individuals. To the extent that POS meets such needs, employees feel as having resources

to face with job demands, and strain should be reduced and, thus, well-being enhanced (Baran *et al.*, 2012). The job demand–resource model (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004) specifically assumes that needs satisfaction is a mechanism that explains the relationship between job resources, such as social support, and well-being at work. In line with this assumption, Van den Broeck *et al.* (2010) found that needs satisfaction was a partial mediator between job resources – i.e. control, decision latitude and social support – and vigor. Furthermore, Gillet *et al.* (2011) showed that needs satisfaction was a partial mediator between context support, job satisfaction and self-realization and was a full mediator of happiness.

In summary, based on the literature, we hypothesize that both POS from the agency and POS from the client company will have a direct and an indirect (via autonomous motivation) effect on work well-being.

Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H3a.* Autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment will partially mediate the relationship between POS from the agency and work engagement.
- H3b.* Autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment will partially mediate the relationship between POS from the agency and burnout.
- H3c.* Autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment will partially mediate the relationship between POS from the client company and work engagement.
- H3d.* Autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment will partially mediate the relationship between POS from the client company and burnout.

Method

Participants and procedure

We presented this study to temporary work agencies. All participating companies received an e-mail containing the link to the online survey, and the companies forwarded the e-mail to their workers. The anonymity of the answers was assured. The participants were informed of the opportunity to receive feedback on the overall results and that the companies would have access to the final report and not to the data itself.

We obtained 3,983 answers from TAWs working in Portugal. The mean age of the participants was 31 years, and they were mainly women (53.60 per cent), with 12th grade (48.80 per cent) or higher education (22.90 per cent). Most participants had job tenure in the client company from fewer than three months (20.90 per cent) to over 18 months (26.70 per cent). The participants worked mainly full time (78.90 per cent), and only a few participants were students (13.80 per cent) or had another job (8.60 per cent). Prior to being in the present job, majority of the participants had been unemployed (51.60 per cent). These sample characteristics were in line with those reported for TAWs in Portugal (CIETT, 2016). Agency work is used by a wide range of companies from different sectors (CIETT, 2016). The services sector is the one that employs more TAWs (40 per cent, CIETT, 2016), followed by the manufacturing sector (32 per cent) and the sectors of construction (10 per cent), public administration (8 per cent) and agriculture (3 per cent). The remaining workers (17 per cent) are employed in other sectors (CIETT, 2016).

Measures

Perceived organizational support. To measure POS from the agency and POS from the client company, we used the Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) scale that was used in a previous Portuguese study with TAWs (Giunchi *et al.*, 2015). An item example is “Help is available from the

organization when I have a problem.” Items were scored on a seven-point rating scale from “totally disagree” (1) to “totally agree” (7), and high scores indicate high levels of POS. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.84 for POS from the agency and 0.87 for POS from the client company.

TAW motivations. TAW motivations were assessed with an adaptation of the Motivation at Work Scale (Gagné *et al.*, 2010) developed by Lopes and Chambel (2014). Twelve items were used to reflect the four types of motivations conceptualized by Ryan and Deci (2000). These constructs are as follows: integrated motivation (e.g. “Because it is the job that best fits to my needs [example: studies, family]”), identified motivation (e.g. “Because it increases my probability of having a better job in the future”), introjected motivation (e.g. “Because I cannot fail to have a job”) and external motivation (e.g. “Because I need to have a salary to live”). For each statement, participants were asked to indicate to what degree they identified each of the above reasons for maintaining their temporary agency employment on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (does not correspond at all) to 7 (corresponds very strongly). As in Fernet *et al.*’s (2015) study, the different types of motivations were combined into autonomous (integrated and identified regulation) and controlled (introjected and external regulation) motivation. The highest scores for a particular type of motivation (i.e. autonomous or controlled motivation) indicates that workers’ reasons for having a temporary agency employment are better reflected by this motivation. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.80 for autonomous motivation and 0.82 for controlled motivation.

Work engagement. Work engagement was measured using the nine-item scale of Schaufeli *et al.* (2006) that was used in a previous Portuguese study with TAWs (Lopes and Chambel, 2017). Vigor, dedication and absorption dimensions of work engagement were each measured by three items (e.g. “At my work I feel bursting with energy,” “I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose” and “I am immersed in my work,” respectively). The respondents answered the items on a seven-point scale that ranged from “never” (1) to “every day” (7), and higher values indicate that workers have higher levels of work engagement. Cronbach’s alpha was good (0.90 for vigor and dedication, and 0.76 for absorption).

Burnout. Burnout was assessed using a Portuguese translation of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach *et al.*, 1996) that was used in previous Portuguese studies with TAWs (Chambel *et al.*, 2015a). In accordance with González-Romá *et al.* (2006), two core dimensions of burnout were selected: exhaustion (five items: e.g. “I feel used up at the end of a work day”) and cynicism (five items: e.g. “I doubt the significance of my work”). The respondents answered the items on a seven-point scale that ranged from 1 (never) to 7 (every day), and higher scores indicated higher burnout levels. Cronbach’s alpha was good (0.91 for exhaustion and 0.83 for cynicism).

Control variables. We controlled gender (0 = men; 1 = women), age (in years), educational level (1 = 9th grade, 2 = 12th grade, 3 = university attendance, 4 = graduate degree) and client company tenure (from 1 = “under three months” to 6 = “over 18 months”) because these variables can influence motives for taking up temporary employment (De Jong and Schalk, 2010).

Results

Measurement models and descriptive analysis

A test of the measurement model was conducted to control for common method variance and to establish discriminant validity (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The one-factor model (with all items, of each studied variable, loading into one latent factor) exhibited poor fit to the data [χ^2 (432) = 36036.71, $p < 0.01$, SRMR = 0.11; CFI = 0.54; IFI = 0.54; RMSEA = 0.14], as well as the five-factor model with the two POS grouped as only one latent factor and the other studied variables as being each one a latent factor [χ^2 (422) = 16498.32, $p < 0.01$, SRMR = 0.07;

CFI = 0.79; IFI = 0.79; RMSEA = 0.10]. However, the six-factor model, i.e. the theoretical model, obtained an acceptable fit [$\chi^2(417) = 6574.05, p < 0.01, SRMR = 0.05; CFI = 0.92; IFI = 0.92; RMSEA = 0.06$]. These analyses revealed that the factor structures of the research variables were consistent with the conceptual model and that the manifest variables loaded, as intended, on the latent variables.

Concerning the mean values, the results presented in Table I showed that TAWs had a perception relatively neutral of POS from the agency and POS from the client company. Furthermore, TAWs had higher controlled motivation than autonomous motivation [$t(3982) = 97.24, p < 0.01$], suggesting that temporary work was a job to avoid unemployment or to gain money and not a desire or an intrinsic choice. Regarding work well-being, workers showed high levels of work engagement and reported occasionally experience burnout. With respect to the correlation matrix, the correlations are generally consistent with the theorized pattern of relationships.

Structural models

We tested the partially mediated model that provided an acceptable fit [$\chi^2(523) = 7994.60, p < 0.01, SRMR = 0.05; CFI = 0.91; IFI = 0.91; RMSEA = 0.06$]. The fully mediated model [$\chi^2(527) = 8681.82, p < 0.01; SRMR = 0.06; CFI = 0.90; IFI = 0.90; RMSEA = 0.06$] with the indirect effects through workers' motivations with no direct paths between the two POS and work well-being (i.e. work engagement and burnout) also showed an acceptable fit. However, the partially mediated model – the model hypothesized – fitted better the data [$\Delta\chi^2(4) = 687.22, p < 0.05$]. Therefore, we considered the partially mediated model as the final model (Figure 1).

As expected, POS from the agency was positively related to autonomous motivation ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.01; SE = 0.02; 95$ per cent CI from 0.23 to 0.32), and POS from the client company also related positively with autonomous motivation ($\beta = 0.36, p < 0.01; SE = 0.01; 95$ per cent CI from 0.31 to 0.41). Thus, *H1* was supported. However, it is worth noting that although not predicted, we also found a positive relationship between POS from the agency and controlled motivation ($\beta = 0.07, p < 0.01; SE = 0.02; 95$ per cent CI from 0.03 to 0.13).

Regarding the relationship between TAW motivations and work well-being, as expected, autonomous motivation showed a positive relationship with work engagement ($\beta = 0.33, p < 0.01; SE = 0.03; 95$ per cent CI from 0.29 to 0.37) and a negative relationship with burnout ($\beta = -0.22, p < 0.01; SE = 0.04; 95$ per cent CI from -0.27 to -0.17), supporting, thereby, *H2a* and *H2b*, respectively. However, no significant relationships were found between controlled motivation and work engagement ($\beta = 0.02, n.s.; SE = 0.02; 95$ per cent CI from -0.01 to 0.06) and controlled motivation and burnout ($\beta = 0.02, n.s.; SE = 0.03; 95$ per cent CI from -0.01 to 0.06). Thus, *H2c* and *H2d* were not supported by the data.

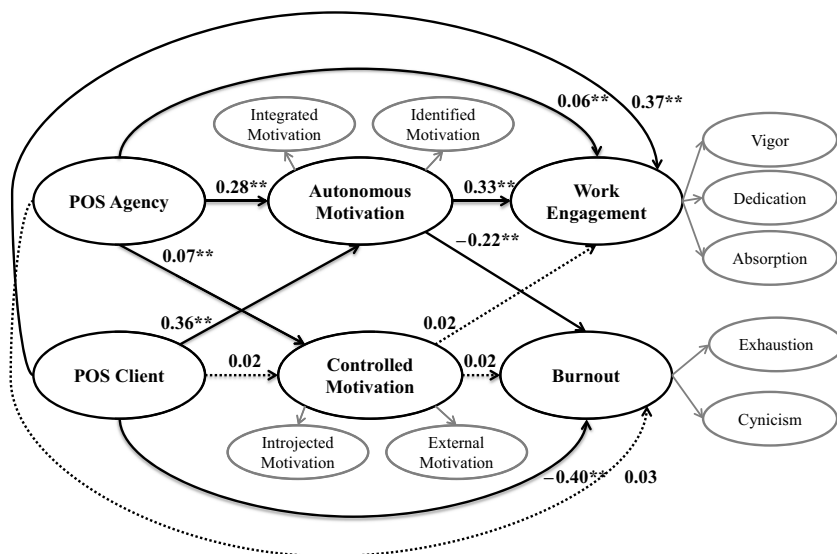
Concerning the mediating role of autonomous motivation, this variable contributes to partially explain the relationship between POS from the agency and work engagement ($Z = 9.32, p < 0.01$), supporting *H3a*. However, the hypothesized mediating role of autonomous motivation in explaining the relationship between POS from the agency and burnout (*H3b*) was not supported by the data. Contrary to expectations, as the direct relationship between POS from the agency and burnout was not significant ($\beta = 0.03, n.s.; SE = 0.03; 95$ per cent CI from -0.02 to 0.07), the precondition for mediation testing was not met – i.e. the antecedent variable must exhibit a significant “total” relationship with the consequent variable when considered alone (Mathieu and Taylor, 2006). In light of Mathieu and Taylor (2006), for the relationship between POS from the agency and burnout, there is only an indirect effect, which is “a special form of intervening effect whereby X [i.e. POS from the agency] and Y [i.e. burnout] are not related directly (i.e., are uncorrelated), but they are

Table I.
Means, standard
deviations and
correlations between
variables

Variable	Mean	SD	<i>r</i> Sample														
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12			
Gender	0.54 ^a	0.50 ^a															
Age	31.15	8.08	-0.10**														
Educational level	3.32 ^a	1.35 ^a	0.20**	-0.14**													
Tenure client	3.48 ^a	1.91 ^a	0.04*	0.08**	-0.03												
POS agency	4.05	1.29	0.05**	0.00	-0.19**	-0.16**											
POS client	4.27	1.39	0.07**	0.00	-0.10**	-0.10**	0.63**										
Autonomous motivation	3.07	1.33	-0.04*	-0.00	-0.17**	-0.12**	0.46**	0.48**									
Controlled motivation	5.63	1.16	0.04*	0.03	-0.11**	0.04*	0.10**	0.08**	0.11**								
Vigor	5.28	1.48	-0.02	0.19**	-0.20**	-0.13**	0.43**	0.52**	0.41**	0.09**							
Dedication	5.16	1.63	-0.01	0.16**	-0.23**	-0.08**	0.46**	0.56**	0.46**	0.08**	0.88**						
Absorption	5.25	1.40	0.00	0.19**	-0.14**	-0.07**	0.35**	0.42**	0.37**	0.12**	0.80**	0.79**					
Exhaustion	3.42	1.68	-0.01	-0.14**	0.04*	0.10**	-0.30**	-0.39**	-0.28**	-0.03	-0.50**	-0.45**	-0.35**				
Cynicism	2.57	1.47	-0.04*	-0.11**	0.05**	0.04**	-0.30**	-0.41**	-0.25**	-0.04**	-0.49**	-0.50**	-0.37**	0.65**			

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

^aValues without statistical significance because it is a dummy variable in the case of gender (0 = men, 1 = women) and a categorical variable in the case of educational level (1 = 9th grade, 2 = 12th grade, 3 = university attendance, 4 = graduate degree) and client organization tenure (from 1 = "under three months" to 6 = "over 18 months")



Notes: ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; \longrightarrow significant path; $\cdots\longrightarrow$ non-significant path

Figure 1. Standardized estimates for the partially mediated model

indirectly related through significant relationships with a linking mechanism [i.e. autonomous motivation]" (pp. 1038-1039).

Additionally, autonomous motivation seems to contribute to partially explain the relationship between POS from the client company and work engagement ($Z = 10.76, p < 0.01$) and burnout ($Z = 7.63, p < 0.01$), supporting, thereby, $H3c$ and $H3d$, respectively.

The control variables contributed significantly toward explaining variance. We found significant relationships between gender and POS from the agency ($\beta = 0.09, p < 0.01$; SE = 0.04; 95 per cent CI from 0.06 to 0.12), POS from the client company ($\beta = 0.10, p < 0.01$; SE = 0.05; 95 per cent CI from 0.07 to 0.14), autonomous motivation ($\beta = -0.08, p < 0.01$; SE = 0.03; 95 per cent CI from -0.11 to -0.05) and controlled motivation ($\beta = 0.06, p < 0.01$; SE = 0.03; 95 per cent CI from 0.03 to 0.09). Concerning age, this variable showed a significant relationship with autonomous motivation ($\beta = 0.04, p < 0.05$; SE = 0.00; 95 per cent CI from 0.01 to 0.07), work engagement ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.01$; SE = 0.00; 95 per cent CI from 0.15 to 0.20) and burnout ($\beta = -0.15, p < 0.01$; SE = 0.00; 95 per cent CI from -0.18 to -0.12). We also found significant relationships between educational level and POS from the agency ($\beta = -0.22, p < 0.01$; SE = 0.02; 95 per cent CI from -0.25 to -0.19), POS from the client company ($\beta = -0.12, p < 0.01$; SE = 0.02; 95 per cent CI from -0.15 to -0.09), autonomous motivation ($\beta = -0.10, p < 0.01$; SE = 0.01; 95 per cent CI from -0.13 to -0.07), controlled motivation ($\beta = -0.12, p < 0.01$; SE = 0.01; 95 per cent CI from -0.16 to -0.09) and work engagement ($\beta = -0.10, p < 0.01$; SE = 0.01; 95 per cent CI from -0.13 to -0.07). The tenure in the client company was also significantly related to POS from the agency ($\beta = -0.17, p < 0.01$; SE = 0.01; 95 per cent CI from -0.20 to -0.14), POS from the client company ($\beta = -0.10, p < 0.01$; SE = 0.01; 95 per cent CI from -0.13 to -0.06), autonomous motivation ($\beta = -0.07, p < 0.01$; SE = 0.01; 95 per cent CI from -0.10 to -0.04), controlled motivation ($\beta = 0.07, p < 0.01$; SE = 0.01; 95 per cent CI from 0.03 to 0.10),

work engagement ($\beta = -0.04, p < 0.01; SE = 0.01; 95 \text{ per cent CI from } -0.07 \text{ to } -0.02$) and burnout ($\beta = 0.04, p < 0.05; SE = 0.01; 95 \text{ per cent CI from } 0.01 \text{ to } 0.07$).

Discussion

Using the SDT as a framework (Ryan and Deci, 2000), the main purpose of the present research was to test a model positing that POS from the agency and POS from the client company would be significantly related to autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment. In turn, autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment was hypothesized to relate to higher levels of workplace well-being (higher work engagement and lower burnout), whereas controlled motivation for temporary agency employment was hypothesized as being negatively associated with workplace well-being. Additionally, we posited that autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment would act as a partial mediator between the two POS and workplace well-being.

In line with previous studies (Gillet *et al.*, 2013b), we observed a positive relationship between both POS from the agency and POS from the client company and autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment. As such, we found support for the process assumed by the SDT; namely, when the context supports the basic psychological needs of individuals, workers will have higher autonomous motivation to get involved in a particular activity (Ryan and Deci, 2000). However, contrary to expected, POS from the agency related positively to controlled motivation for temporary agency employment. As an alternative explanation, we could advance the quantitative perspective of motivation. Although the SDT addresses the importance of analyzing the quality of motivation, this approach also recognizes the existence of “quantity” or “intensity” of motivation (Deci *et al.*, 2017). By using latent profile analysis, Van den Broeck *et al.* (2013) identified a profile characterized by high autonomous motivation and high controlled motivation. More recently, using latent profile analysis, in a sample of contingent workers, Sobral *et al.* (2019) found a “high motivation” profile that was characterized by presenting both highly controlled and highly autonomous motivation. Overall, these studies suggest that some individuals may have a high amount (or quantity) of motivation to be involved in a certain course of action, regardless of the quality of their motivation (i.e. autonomous or controlled motivation). In the current research, the significant contribution of POS from the agency to both autonomous and controlled motivation seems to suggest that POS from the agency is a relevant resource by contributing both to the quantity (i.e. the amount of motivation) and the quality of motivation (i.e. the nature of motivation). In line with this assumption, Gillet *et al.* (2013a) also observed a significant positive relationship between POS and controlled motivation, and the authors concluded that “perhaps some aspects of support affect autonomous motivation, while others affect controlled motivation” (Gillet *et al.*, 2013a: 7). Because POS helps to fulfill the three basic psychological needs of individuals (i.e. relatedness, autonomy and competence), future studies analyzing the relationship between needs satisfaction and workers’ motivations are needed (Gillet *et al.*, 2013a), particularly with TAWs. These studies may provide some clues for understanding why POS was significantly related to controlled motivation.

Along with these alternative explanations, it should be noted that contrary to permanent employment relationships – where the employment relationship only encloses the link employee–employer – TAWs have a trifold employment relationship, which encloses the employee, the temporary work agency and the client company (Lopes and Chambel, 2014). TAWs have a unique employment relationship because they perform their job at the client company workplace, but they are paid by and their legal employer is the temporary work agency (De Cuyper *et al.*, 2008). Due to these unique characteristics,

by comparing the support received from the client company to the support received from the temporary work agency, the extrinsic rewards received from the temporary work agency can be more easily noticed by TAWs. As such, the support provided by the temporary work agency may have a significant contribution, not only in the autonomous motivation of TAWs but also in their controlled motivation (e.g. accept the temporary work because they need to have a salary to live).

However, beyond the unexpected link between POS from the agency and controlled motivation, as mentioned previously, POS from the agency may also have a contribution to the quality of motivation: In the present study, the relationship between POS from the agency and autonomous motivation was found as being stronger than the relationship between POS from the agency and controlled motivation. Future studies should replicate this study with TAWs to analyze if this pattern of results is maintained.

In line with the study of [Lopes and Chambel \(2017\)](#), we found that autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment had a positive relationship with work engagement. Furthermore, consistent with other studies using permanent workers ([Fernet *et al.*, 2015](#)), we observed a negative relationship between autonomous motivation and burnout. However, no significant relationships were found between controlled motivation for temporary agency employment and workplace well-being. These findings may underline the vulnerability of TAWs that comes from the instability and insecurity associated with this work arrangement ([Chambel *et al.*, 2015b](#)). When the worker's assignment to a client company is completed, the worker has no guarantee of maintaining an activity, as the employment contract with the agency has ended. Consequently, to increase the likelihood of having another job assignment, workers may avoid showing a decrease in work engagement and an increase in burnout levels when they have controlled motivations. Future studies should examine the extent to which this explanation is valid to justify the results obtained.

Concerning the direct relationships predicted between both POS (i.e. POS from the agency and POS from the client company) and work well-being (i.e. work engagement and burnout), all links were found as being significant in the present study. The only exception was for the direct relationship between POS from the agency and burnout. An alternative explanation for this unexpected result can be due to the specificities of the TAW employment relationship. As mentioned above, TAWs perform their job at the client company workplace ([De Cuyper *et al.*, 2008](#)). As such, the work experiences that may contribute to the workers' burnout (e.g. job demands) are mainly lived at the client company workplace. Therefore, whereas the POS from the client company was found as being directly related to the workers' burnout, the contribution of the POS from the agency to reduce the workers' burnout can be only indirect (i.e. through autonomous motivation). Future studies should replicate this study to analyze if this pattern of results remains.

Regarding the mediating hypothesis, overall the results appear to support the autonomous motivation for temporary agency employment as an important variable that contributes to explaining the relationship between the two foci of POS – from the agency and the client company – and workplace well-being (i.e. work engagement and burnout). Therefore, there is a mechanism according to which the two POS are related first to the autonomous motivation, and in turn, autonomous motivation will contribute to explaining the TAWs' well-being. However, our findings indicated the existence of significant direct relationships, namely, between POS from the agency and work engagement and between POS from the client company and work engagement and burnout. The fact that some direct relationships were significant shows that there are alternative paths – beyond the quality of motivation for temporary agency employment. Future research may analyze other mediators

along with autonomous motivation. Indeed, organizational support theory identifies eight key processes for the positive links between POS and favorable outcomes, namely, personification of the organization, organizational discretion, organization sincerity, organizational embodiment, felt obligation, reward expectancy, socioemotional need fulfillment and anticipated help (Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011).

Limitations

Some limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study has a cross-sectional design and, therefore, causality cannot be established. Future studies are necessary with a longitudinal design to overcome this constraint. Second, this research relies on self-report measures raising common method bias concerns. However, Spector (2006) argued that common method bias in surveys appears frequently to be more of an “urban legend”. Moreover, we followed the methodological recommendations of Podsakoff *et al.* (2003); namely, we demonstrated the best fit of our model compared with a single factor model by conducting confirmatory factor analysis, we guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality of the answers, we indicated that there were no right or wrong answers and we used standardized measures that had already been used in previous studies. Third, this study was conducted solely with TAW. Future studies could analyze other types of contingent work (e.g. on-call work, outsourcing) (Sobral *et al.*, 2019). Finally, this research was conducted in a Portuguese context, with a Western culture, where many TAWs want to be hired by the client company (Sobral *et al.*, 2019). As such, future research is needed with employees from other countries to replicate, broaden and generalize the present results.

Practical implications

This study highlighted the role of social factors – like the organizational support – as motivational determinants. Therefore, it is important that both temporary work agencies and client companies develop a set of policies to increase TAWs’ positive POS that contributes to the satisfaction of workers’ psychological needs for relatedness, autonomy and competence. First, to have the need for relatedness satisfied, people need to realize that organizations value their contribution and are committed to developing a quality employment relationship based on trust, respect, cohesion, open communication and mutual support between people (Chambel *et al.*, 2015a; Hanisch and Wald, 2014). Actions like inviting TAWs to be part of events (e.g. Christmas party) and meetings, where important decisions of the organization are made, should contribute to satisfying this need. In addition, client companies could nominate a coworker to assume the figure of “buddy” helping with the integration of TAWs within the company. To contribute to the need for autonomy, it is important that the firms allow workers to have a choice about whether they want to perform their job, giving to the workers freedom about the way they manage their work (Olafsen *et al.*, 2015). The lack of autonomy at work has been pointed out as one of the main reasons for TAWs having lower job satisfaction (Kalleberg *et al.*, 2015). To contribute to the satisfaction of workers’ needs for competence, organizations need to provide workers with the necessary means to perform their work in the best way, providing them with all the necessary information and giving positive and continuous feedback on their work (Olafsen *et al.*, 2015). For example, organizations need to provide the same training actions they offer to their permanent workers, for TAWs to have all the information needed to better perform their job (Chambel and Sobral, 2011).

To increase autonomous motivation, temporary work agencies should demonstrate an investment in the employment relationship with TAWs. This could be obtained by effective and frequent communication with TAWs that allows agencies to remain updated about the

daily working life of their employees (Chambel *et al.*, 2015b). On the client companies' side, these companies need to proportionate a positive experience in the workplace, be transparent concerning assignment decisions and provide opportunities for skills development that allows the satisfaction of workers' needs (Chambel *et al.*, 2015b).

Attending to the positive relationship between autonomous motivation and work well-being, the quality of motivation emerged as being a crucial determinant of organizational effectiveness by promoting higher levels of work well-being (Deci *et al.*, 2017). Thus, by addressing the quality of motivation, the SDT was demonstrated to be a valuable framework for guiding practical interventions with TAWs.

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