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de Jong, J.P.; Schalk, R.

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Extrinsic Motives as Moderators in the Relationship Between Fairness and Work-Related Outcomes Among Temporary Workers

Jeroen de Jong · René Schalk

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Abstract

Purpose This study assessed how motives for having a temporary job influence the effects of experienced fairness on work-related attitudes.

Design/methodology/approach We examined the moderating effect of three motives for being in temporary employment (the autonomous or voluntary motive, the stepping-stone motive, and the controlled or involuntary motive) on the relationship between experienced fairness and outcomes. Hierarchical multiple regressions were performed on questionnaire data of a sample of 299 Dutch temporary workers.

Findings For temporary employees who accepted temporary employment voluntarily, low fairness is related to lower self-reported performance. For employees who use their temporary job as a way to obtain permanent employment, fairness is not related to work-related attitudes and behavioral intentions. Those who are involuntarily in a temporary job react stronger on fairness and have a higher intention to quit.

Implications Fairness is weakly related to work-related attitudes and behavioral intentions under two conditions: when perceived goal attainment is high, and when the worker is dependent on the temporary job to reach that goal. This study provides support for the assumption that motives may override automatic responses to fairness.

Originality/value This article is one of the first studies that provide evidence for the influence of motives on reactions to fairness. Additionally, this study considers reactions to fairness in a growing contingent of the workforce, that is temporary workers. It provides evidence that the dynamics in fairness perceptions may be different for temporary workers in comparison to their counterparts with permanent contracts.

Keywords Temporary employment · Motives · Job expectations · Fairness · Goal attainment · Goal dependency · Moderators

Introduction

There is a growing body of research evidence that demonstrates the influence of perceived fairness/justice in the workplace on work-related attitudes and behavior (for overviews, see, e.g., Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001; Colquitt et al. 2001; Folger and Cropanzano 1998; Van den Bos and Lind 2002). In addition, several moderators have been identified, including organizational structure (Schminke et al. 2000), personality (Colquitt et al. 2006; Skarlicki et al. 1999), and justice sensitivity (Schmitt and Dorfel 1999).

Moreover, it is argued by cognitive and fairness researchers that motives, needs, and goals may moderate relationships between fairness and attitudes and behavior by influencing reactions to fairness (Bargh 1984; Greenberg 1990). For example, Bargh (1984) noted that coping with certain situations could be temporarily activated by the motives for entering those situations. According to Bargh (1984), motives could outweigh the reactions to experienced fairness by decreasing or erasing its effects.

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J. de Jong (✉) · R. Schalk
Department of Organization Studies, Tilburg University,
Tilburg, The Netherlands
e-mail: j.p.dejong@uvt.nl

R. Schalk
e-mail: M.J.D.Schalk@uvt.nl

Consequently, this would imply that the effects of perceptions of fairness or unfairness with respect to a certain employment situation depend on the reason(s) for being in that fair or unfair situation. Empirical evidence on this mechanism is scarce, however. Therefore, our aim was to add to the literature on reactions to fairness perceptions by designing a study in which we could assess the role of these motives on the relationship between perceived fairness and attitudinal and behavioral outcomes.

Based on motivation and coping theories, we hypothesized that certain motives moderate the relation between fairness and outcomes. We approached and tested this argument using a sample of temporary workers. Temporary jobs—such as fixed-term contracts and temporary agency work—create situations in which fairness or unfairness has a foreseen end, in the sense that temporary jobs have an explicit or implicit end-date (Polivka 1996). Research on fairness perceptions, however, has been primarily conducted in the context of permanent employment (Cameron et al. 2007). In temporary employment relationships, motives for having a temporary job are regarded as important factors in determining temporary employee work outcomes (De Cuyper et al. 2008). Moreover, Connelly and Gallagher (2004) consider motives to be a moderator in the relationship between perceptions of organizational treatment and attitudes of temporary employees. However, the role of motives in the relationship between fairness perceptions and temporary employee attitudes has not yet been assessed empirically.

Therefore, this article links the fairness literature to the growing literature on motives for taking up temporary employment (see, e.g., Bendapudi et al. 2003; Tan and Tan 2002). Motives for having a temporary job include working on a temporary basis to obtain permanent employment or to be able to balance work and private life, or because there are no permanent jobs available (Nollen 1996; Von Hippel et al. 2000). All these motives have a predominantly extrinsic character, that is to say, the motive for working on a temporary basis is to attain a specific outcome or goal, contrary to the intrinsic motivation to work because work provides pleasure (Ryan and Deci 2000).

The central question in our study was how extrinsic motives for having a temporary job moderate the relations of perceived fairness and work-related attitudes and behavior. More specifically, we expected that the nature of the extrinsic motive for accepting temporary employment moderates the relation between perceptions of fairness and work-related attitudes and behavior, including affective commitment, job satisfaction, trust, intention to quit, and perceived performance.

We drew on such theories as self-determination theory (SDT) and the results of research on motives of temporary workers in selecting three specific motives and examining

the effects of reactions to fairness. SDT of Deci and Ryan (1985) and Ryan and Deci (2000) suggests that autonomous and externally controlled choices for an activity are different with respect to both the underlying choice processes and the accompanying experiences. These choices are dependent on the specific goals and needs of the person, and have been found to be related to several outcomes, such as wellbeing (Gagne and Deci 2005). Additionally, Deci and Ryan (1985) and Ryan and Deci (2000) acknowledge that workers may have specific goals beyond the job, and use the job as a stepping stone to these goals. We formulated hypotheses on the specific moderating roles of the three motives (autonomous, stepping stone, controlled) and tested these hypotheses in a sample of 299 Dutch temporary workers. In this article, we describe the methodology and results, and end by discussing the outcomes of our findings and suggesting future research.

Theory

Fairness perceptions are reflections of past or present experiences of organizational procedures, relations, and/or rewards and benefits. Perceived fairness is a subjective sense of what is fair and what is unfair (Van den Bos and Lind 2002). According to the instrumental perspective on fairness (Tyler 1987), being fairly treated matters to the extent that the psychological need for control is fulfilled. The need for control is manifested as ‘a desire to predict and manage important interactions, including those that involve the exchange and/or receipt of desired outcomes’ (Cropanzano et al. 2001, p. 176).

Being mistreated implies that there are events that conflict with the psychological need for control (Cropanzano et al. 2001). These conflicts are likely to trigger negative affect and negative behavior (Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001; Colquitt et al. 2001). However, when trying to fulfill their need for control and attain desired outcomes, individuals may take a long-term perspective—extending their contract period—in their evaluation of fairness. People may be willing to forgo unfavorable outcomes temporarily if beneficial outcomes are expected in the long run (Thibaut and Walker 1975). It has been proposed that higher-order cognitive preferences—which include current plans, goals, motives, and needs (Bargh 1984)—may temporarily override behavioral impulses (Kehr 2004). Bargh (1984) suggests that the readiness to cope with certain situations may be temporarily activated by goals and needs that increase power over the perception and thought of the fulfillment of the psychological need for control. In other words, the motive of self-interest is what determines the drive to act on fairness (Cropanzano et al. 2001, 2005).

Previous research on reactions to fairness has already touched on the role of self-oriented expectations and goals. Hirschman and Rothschild (1973), for example, argue that people will tolerate inequality temporarily as long as they expect that their turn will come. This is in line with findings showing that temporary injustice is less upsetting than situations in which injustice is expected to have an enduring character (Lerner and Simmons 1966). Moreover, coping theory emphasizes the importance of self-determined expectations regarding the future in reactions to fair or unfair situations. Coping can be defined as cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage the internal and external demands of transactions that tax or exceed a person's resources (Latack and Havlovic 1992, p. 483). The cognitive efforts involve making optimistic comparisons of one's situation in order to enhance one's perception of the present situation (Latack 1984); judging the present as an improvement over the past, and viewing the future as likely to be better than the present (Menaghan and Merves 1984).

Motives and SDT

The concept of self-interest or self-determination is central to many motivation theories. For example, expectancy value theory (Feather and Rauter 2004) and choice-process theory (Lawler 1992) suggest that choice for an activity or action occurs based on sets of options or means, and legitimized goals for the future. Furthermore, choice-process theory suggests that greater self-determined choice (control) and explicit focus on the goal of self-determination and enhancement leads to positive feelings (Lawler 1992).

The level of choice and the content of the goals are incorporated in the motives people who have to engage in certain situations or relations. Following SDT (Deci and Ryan (1985), motives can be either intrinsic or extrinsic, and attaining goals can be either autonomous (self-determined) or controlled by others. People who use an intrinsic motive want to engage in the activity themselves (Ryan et al. 1996). They seek the pleasure that comes from the task itself or from the situation in which the task is performed (Locke 1991). This is likely to be self-chosen and thus autonomous. Autonomy involves acting with a sense of volition and having the experience of choice (Gagne and Deci 2005).

Workers who are oriented toward the development of the self, on the other hand, primarily use extrinsic motives. For people who act based on extrinsic motives, pleasure comes from something the task provides (Locke 1991) or, as Deci and Ryan (1985, p. 35) state: 'In essence, extrinsic motivation refers to behavior where the reason for doing it is something other than an interest in the activity itself.' Therefore, the activity is instrumental in achieving a goal other than deriving pleasure from the task itself. Such

achievements are strongly influenced by the social demands and normative pressures that generate cognitive preferences (Kehr 2004). However, the achievement of extrinsically motivated goals and self-interest is, limitedly or largely, under the control of others (Ryan et al. 1996). Being controlled implies acting on the basis of pressure, and the feeling that one has to engage in the action in order to achieve goals (Gagne and Deci 2005). Temporary workers, for example, are dependent on their employer if they want to be given a permanent job in the organization.

According to Deci and Ryan's (1985) organismic integration theory, which is a subtheory of SDT, many behaviors are extrinsically motivated and at the same time volitionally initiated and valued: these behaviors are thus self-regulated (Ryan et al. 1996). SDT describes the processes through which extrinsic motivation can become autonomous by distinguishing different types of extrinsic motivations (Gagne and Deci 2005), which are dependent on the level of autonomy and character of the goals. For workers who are autonomously motivated, the activity is not the primary interest. The activity is instrumental in achieving important personal goals (Ryan and Deci 2000), which are other than work-related goals. For temporary workers, these goals are, for example, to have more time for and flexibility as regards study or family, or simply to have more spare time (Ellingson et al. 1998; Peel and Boxall 2005; Tan and Tan 2002).

Others may perceive that their choice to be in a job situation is not entirely autonomous. Although they do not think of the job situation as their primary choice, they choose the job situation because it could enable them to achieve their goals in the long run. In other words, the workers explicitly use the job as an instrument to achieve a job-related goal. This is the case when workers feel that they are competent to reach the goal. The motive that fits this description is the explicit use of a temporary job as a stepping stone to permanent work (Giesecke and Gross 2003; Tan and Tan 2002). This stepping-stone (or 'temp-to-perm') motive resides on the cutting edge between autonomous and controlled motivations.

In the case of controlled motivation, workers act because they are forced to do so in order to reach their goals. The goal can be to obtain a desirable outcome or to avoid an undesired one (Gagne and Deci 2005). Temporary workers might strive to obtain a permanent job, but if they are unable to get one they are forced to take a temporary job. The alternative would be unemployment (Tan and Tan 2002). However, they do not explicitly use the temporary job as a stepping stone to permanent employment. These workers 'view temporary work as undesirable and choose to pursue it not because of its unique work arrangement, but because of a lack of other employment alternatives' (Ellingson et al. 1998, p. 913).

For the purpose of this study, we selected three motives for being employed on a temporary contract that match the three types of extrinsic motives based on Deci and Ryan and Deci (2000) described above, namely the autonomous motive, the stepping-stone motive, and the controlled motive. Using these three types, we were able to assess the impact of the motives on relations between fairness and outcomes among temporary workers. In the following, we elaborate the effect of each specific motive for the situation of temporary employment. We also present hypotheses about the influence of each of the motives on the relationship between fairness and work-related attitudes and behaviors.

Hypotheses

Perceived fairness is found to be a strong positive predictor of work-related attitudes, such as organizational commitment (Loi et al. 2006), job satisfaction (Lam et al. 2002), and trust (Dirks and Ferrin 2001), and of such behaviors as organizational citizenship behavior (Williams et al. 2002) and performance (Williams 1999). In addition, empirical evidence shows that higher perceived fairness is related to a lower intention to quit (Fields et al. 2000). When workers feel that they are treated fairly, they show favorable attitudes and behavior and fewer intentions to quit. Therefore, we hypothesized the following on the relation of fairness to the attitudes and behaviors included in this study.

H1 Perceived fairness is positively related to affective commitment, job satisfaction, trust and perceived performance, and negatively related to intention to quit.

The Autonomous Motive and Fairness-Outcome Relations

The autonomous and controlled motives have been used before to assess the influence on attitudes and behavior of the level of choice in taking on temporary work (Isaksson and Bellagh 2002; Silla et al. 2005). Research in this field, however, mainly uses the distinction between voluntary versus involuntary acceptance of temporary employment. Employees who took on their job based on an autonomous extrinsic motive, act to reach certain outcomes, rather than on an inherent enjoyment of work (Ryan and Deci 2000). Temporary workers who voluntarily and autonomously took their job prefer the freedom that temporary work provides, for example with respect to combining private and working life (Ellingson et al. 1998; Tan and Tan 2002). These workers are not seeking permanent employment and they deliberately opt for temporary employment because it suits their current personal needs. Research suggests that

this type of motivation creates positive outcomes (Ryan et al. 1996). SDT explains this positive relationship by seeing autonomy as fulfilling a psychological need (Deci and Ryan 1985). Situations that foster feelings of autonomy fulfill the need for autonomy and thus enhance motivation (Gagne and Deci 2005). This is supported by the consistent finding that voluntary temporary workers have favorable attitudes and behavior in comparison to involuntary workers (Ellingson et al. 1998; Krausz 2000).

The question we addressed is what kind of association this motive has with the relation between fairness and outcomes. Folger and Cropanzano (1998, p. 23) state that when one has a choice in selecting situations of inequity, one has only oneself to blame, which is consistent with dissonance-reducing rationalizations. These rationalizations may be triggered by seeking specific rewards supporting the fulfillment of the need for autonomy, which overrules initial responses to fairness. Although the temporary job may not be instrumental in attaining the goal of permanent employment, it might support other personal goals. Personal goals such as studying, traveling, or taking care of the family may be evaluated as more beneficial for the future. Basically, for these voluntary workers “the organization (...) is simply the place where they seek immediate rewards from the employment situation” (Millward and Brewerton 2000, pp. 13–14). Therefore, rewards that support these goals might be considered as more important than the fairness of work outcomes (Thibaut and Walker 1975). This line of reasoning suggests that voluntary temporary workers will evaluate the employment relationship on the basis of the amount of rewards received rather than the fairness of the employment relationship. The moderating effect of voluntariness has also been supported empirically: Gordon and Fryxell (1989) found that when association with unions is voluntary, justice correlates less with satisfaction than it does under conditions of involuntary association. This leads to the assumption that the motive that the temporary job is voluntary and supportive to the fulfillment of needs related to, for example, family and study, will overrule automatic reactions to fairness.

H2 Fairness is less related to (a) affective commitment, (b) job satisfaction, (c) trust, (d) intention to quit, and (e) perceived performance among temporary workers who score high on the autonomous motive in comparison to temporary workers who have a low score on this motive.

The Stepping-Stone Motive and Fairness-Outcome Relations

Many temporary workers use a temporary job as a stepping stone to a permanent position (DiNatale 2001; Remery

et al. 2002). Motives such as ‘This job may lead to permanent employment’ are frequently mentioned reasons for accepting temporary employment (DiNatale 2001; Nollen 1996; Tan and Tan 2002). The temporary job is seen as instrumental in obtaining a permanent contract, since these workers prefer permanent to temporary employment. Therefore, expectations of future permanent employment are often a central component of the temporary work situation. Moreover, research has indicated that having the prospect of a permanent contract has positive consequences for work-related attitudes and behavior (Tan and Tan 2002).

Based on Vroom’s (1964) expectancy theory, Wheeler and Buckley (2001) suggest that temporary workers whose motivation to accept their position is to gain permanent employment are extra motivated. The goal of obtaining a permanent contract may then serve as a filter in the perception of the employment relationship. In addition, when an object is relevant to a goal, that object will be more positively evaluated (Ferguson and Bargh 2004).

Moreover, to assess the relation between experienced inequality and performance, Vecchio (1982) deliberately excluded workers who had been led to expect future employment. According to Vecchio (1982), for these workers the inequity-outcome effect may be transient, because they reduce their felt inequity through rationalization processes. This could imply that people sometimes choose to accept an offer that will under-compensate them for their work because the official compensation is only part of what they hope to receive. In such cases, the act of committing oneself engenders a dissonance-like process of self-justification (Folger and Cropanzano 1998, p. 22). This is in line with coping theory (Latack et al. 1995), which proposes that workers choose their reactions to their employment situations on the basis of their expectations of the future. When they explicitly opt for a temporary job, and thereby expect to be able to use their job as a means to obtain permanent employment, it is expected that they will have a high coping efficacy. Reactions to unfair treatment will therefore not primarily be action driven, but cognitive. This line of reasoning is supported by the empirical findings of Veenstra et al. (2004), who found that temporary workers who perceived that they had a future with the employing organization were less willing to collectively respond to injustice.

We therefore expected that work-related attitudes and behavior are unrelated to fairness perceptions when workers have a temporary job on the basis of the stepping-stone motive.

H3 Fairness is less related to (a) affective commitment, (b) job satisfaction, (c) trust, (d) intention to quit, and (e) perceived performance among temporary workers who

score high on the stepping-stone motive in comparison to temporary workers who have a low score on this motive.

The Controlled Motive and Fairness-Outcome Relations

The third motive associated with having temporary employment is the controlled (or involuntary) motive (Tan and Tan 2002). As mentioned, controlled motives imply acting because of external pressure and being obliged to engage in the action (Gagne and Deci 2005). Controlled motives include, for example, having a temporary job because it was the only one available (Cohany 1998) or because it was not possible to find a permanent job (Tan and Tan 2002). Often, employees who report this motive seek permanent employment but are unable to achieve this because of, for example, a lack of required skills or qualifications (Tan and Tan 2002). These employees want to avoid unemployment by engaging in temporary employment; however, they do not necessarily explicitly expect to obtain permanent employment by accepting this particular temporary job.

Previous research has confirmed that control, or involuntariness, has several negative effects on the work-related attitudes and behavior of temporary workers (Feldman and Turnley 2004; Isaksson and Bellagh 2002; Sheldon et al. 2004). Contrary to a voluntary situation—which promotes autonomy—controlled or involuntary situations diminish feelings of autonomy, making people less motivated (Gagne and Deci 2005).

How does controlled motivation affect relations between fairness and outcomes? Folger and Cropanzano (1998) state that in situations of no choice, one can blame others for situations of inequity and react with feelings of resentment. According to the perspective of coping theory (Latack et al. 1995), the absence of positive expectations may lead to more action-driven coping strategies than cognitive coping strategies. These action-driven coping strategies include protest and leaving the scene. Moreover, Gordon and Fryxell (1989) found that in a condition of involuntary affiliation with a union, justice is more strongly related to satisfaction than it is in the case of voluntary affiliation. Finally, a study by Veenstra et al. (2004) shows that temporary workers with no future in the organization are more willing to respond collectively to injustice. Based on these results, we believe that for workers who are controlled and extrinsically motivated, fairness has more impact.

H4 Fairness is more strongly related to (a) affective commitment, (b) job satisfaction, (c) trust, (d) intention to quit, and (e) perceived performance among temporary workers who score high on the controlled motive than among temporary workers who score low on this motive.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The data for this study were collected in the Netherlands. Temporary workers were surveyed in the context of a large-scale, multi-country comparative study of the health and wellbeing of permanent and temporary employees (PSYCONES 2005). The 299 respondents, each of whom had a temporary job, were employed in four sectors: retail ($N = 87$), manufacturing ($N = 95$), health care ($N = 17$), and education ($N = 100$).

For the retail sector, we contacted such organizations as shops and insurance companies. Organizations in the manufacturing sector were primarily producing food products; however, the sample also included bicycle manufacturers and producers of heavy machinery. The educational sample included high schools, universities, and institutes of professional education. The health-care sample included two hospitals. A total of 40 organizations participated in the study, namely 14 retail organizations, 12 manufacturing organizations, 12 educational organizations, and 2 health-care organizations. These sectors were selected in order to maximize variance across the types of temporary workers. In the manufacturing sample, we expected to find respondents who were employed through temporary employment agencies. The educational sector was selected in order to sample temporary workers employed on fixed-term contracts. Finally, retail and health-care organizations were used in order to acquire a mixed sample with varying temporary arrangements. The number of responses per organization ranged from 2 to 27.

The participating organizations were asked to randomly select temporary workers from their workforce; the selection was to include, for example, fixed-term workers, temporary agency workers, and seasonal workers. When sampling was not possible, all temporary workers were included. These employees were given a written questionnaire to fill in at home, and asked to return the completed questionnaire directly to the researchers.

The total response rate was 35%; responses per organization varied from 15 to 87%. This resulted in a sample of 148 female and 151 male temporary employees. The average age was 32.15 years. The average duration of the temporary arrangements was a little shorter than 1 year (11.9 months). The sample included both fixed-term workers who were directly hired by the organization (74%) and temporary agency workers (26%).

Measurement of Independent and Moderating Variables

To allow for an explicit focus on the influence of motives on relations between fairness perceptions and outcomes,

we used a general measure of perceptions of fairness developed by Guest and Conway (2002). This measure includes four items covering distributive, procedural, and interactional aspects of fairness, which are the three most prominent forms of fairness (Colquitt et al. 2001). To reduce complexity, however, we used the aggregated measure as our independent variable. The four items used were (1) 'Do you feel that you are paid fairly for the work you do?' (2) 'Overall, do you feel that you are rewarded fairly for the amount of effort you put into your job?' (3) 'Do you feel that organizational changes are implemented fairly in your organization?' and (4) 'Do you feel fairly treated by managers and supervisors?' The scale has five response categories, ranging from 'not at all' to 'totally' (Cronbach's alpha = .70).

As indicated, we distinguished three types of extrinsic motives for having a temporary job, that is, the autonomous motive, the stepping-stone motive, and the controlled motive. We used single items to assess these motives. Single items were also used in previous studies to assess the motivation to take temporary jobs (e.g., Bernasek and Kinnear 1999; Feldman and Turnley 2004; Marler et al. 2002). The strength of each motive was measured on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The autonomous motive for having a temporary job was assessed by: 'It suits my present needs/situation (e.g., family, study, leisure, ...).' Fulfilling a need is the most frequently mentioned motive in relation to voluntary acceptance (Hardy and Walker 2003; Morris and Vekker 2001). Our measure captures in one item such personal needs as study, leisure, and family.

The stepping-stone motive includes the desire to obtain and the expectation of obtaining a permanent job, for which the following item was used: 'This way, I hope to be given a permanent employment contract.' This item assesses the use of a temporary job as a stepping stone to permanent employment, and thereby explicitly emphasizes goals and expectations with respect to the future.

Finally, the controlled motive is primarily found in situations in which workers cannot find a permanent job because of a problematic labor market (Ellingson et al. 1998; Tan and Tan 2002). Therefore, we used the following item to assess this motive: 'It is difficult for me to find a permanent job.' This item was intended to measure the motive in situations where a temporary job is not explicitly used as a stepping stone.

Outcome Measures

Five measures reflect diverse reactions to fairness. The outcomes are attitudes (affective commitment, job satisfaction, trust), behavioral intentions (intention to quit), and self-reported behavior (perceived performance). The

affective commitment scale of Cook and Wall (1980) measures employees' feelings of commitment to the organization they work for. We asked our respondents to respond to such statements as 'I feel myself to be part of the organization' on a 5-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' (Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$). Job satisfaction was assessed using a scale based on Brayfield and Rothe's Job Satisfaction Index (1951). Four items were used (on a 5-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'), such as 'I find enjoyment in my job' (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$). Trust was measured with three items from Guest and Conway (1998), which include organizational and leadership trust (Clark and Payne 1997). The measure included such items as: 'To what extent do you trust your immediate line manager to look after your best interests?' The trust scale used five response categories, ranging from 'not at all' to 'totally' (Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$). Intention to quit was measured using a 4-item scale. The scale was adapted from Price (1997) and Sjöberg and Sverke (2000) to fit the temporary perspective of temporary workers. The following items were included: 'These days, I often feel like quitting'; 'Despite the obligations I have made to this organization, I want to quit my job as soon as possible'; 'At this moment, I would like to stay with this organization as long as possible (reversed),' and 'If I could, I would quit today.' The response categories for this 5-point scale ranged from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$). For perceived performance, we used a scale developed by Abramis (1994). We asked respondents to think about their previous week at work and to rate how well they performed on six tasks, namely decision-making, performing without making mistakes, goal attainment, effort, taking initiatives, and taking responsibility. Five response categories were used, ranging from 'very badly' to 'very well' (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$).

Control Variables

Research has indicated that demographic and work-related variables influence fairness perceptions (Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001) and such outcomes as affective commitment (Mathieu and Zajac 1990), performance (Abramis 1994), and intention to quit (Abraham 1999). Demographic variables can also influence motives for taking up temporary employment (Bernasek and Kinnear 1999; Tan and Tan 2002). Therefore, we controlled for several demographic and work-related variables, including gender, age, position, and educational level. We also added two variables that are specific to temporary work, namely contract duration and contract form.

Gender (female = 0, male = 1) was dummy coded. Age was measured as a continuous variable. Educational

level was assessed using ISCED levels (OECD 1999), ranging from 0 (pre-primary education) to 6 (second stage tertiary education). Position was measured on six occupational levels, ranging from 1 (unskilled blue collar worker) to 6 (manager or director). Contract duration was measured in months, and is thus a continuous variable. Finally, contract form was dummy coded, using 0 for fixed-term workers and 1 for temporary agency workers.

Analyses

We followed the procedure for testing moderating effects suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). Five hierarchical multiple regressions were performed with affective commitment, job satisfaction, intention to quit, trust, and perceived performance as dependent variables. All scores were standardized. The following procedure was used to determine the effects of the independent and moderating variables. Demographic variables including age, gender, educational level, contract duration, contract form, and organizational position were entered in step 1 to control for their effects; the independent variable (fairness) was entered in step 2. The motives for having temporary employment (autonomous, stepping stone, controlled) were entered in step 3. Finally, the product terms of fairness with the three motives were entered into the model in the fourth and last step.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations (Pearson r) between the variables used in this study. Fairness correlates moderately to strong with the outcome variables affective commitment ($r = .40$), job satisfaction ($r = .35$), trust ($r = .69$), intention to quit ($r = -.31$), and perceived performance ($r = .19$). The moderating variables show weak to moderate correlations with the outcome variables. Only the controlled motive has a weak relation with fairness ($r = -.13$). The moderating variables (with the exception of one intercorrelation) are not significantly related. The autonomous motive is negatively related to the stepping-stone motive ($r = -.23$, $p < .001$). This implies that workers who voluntarily take temporary jobs to fulfill personal needs do not explicitly search for permanent employment. Although respondents could opt for more than one motive, there are no indications for considerable overlap between the motives. This supports our assumption that the three motives can be treated as separate constructs.

Of the demographic variables, age is related to the moderating and outcome variables. Older workers show lower levels of autonomy ($r = -.23$) and higher levels of

Table 1 Descriptive statistics, correlations ($n = 299$)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Gender (0 = female, 1 = male)	.51	.50														
2. Age	32.2	9.9	.05													
3. Educational level	4.8	1.3	-.05	.02												
4. Position	3.3	1.4	-.08	.08	.66***											
5. Duration in months	11.9	13.2	-.13*	.01	.26***	.31***										
6. Contract (0 = d, 1 = I)	.26	.44	.03	-.16**	-.02	-.20**	-.23***									
7. Fairness	3.6	.77	-.07	.09	.01	.14*	.08	-.16**								
8. Autonomous	1.9	1.4	-.03	-.23***	-.03	-.13*	-.06	.18**	-.00							
9. Stepping stone	3.5	1.6	.09	.23***	-.16**	-.05	-.17**	-.07	.03	-.23***						
10. Controlled	2.3	1.5	.14*	-.02	-.13*	-.27***	-.24***	.35***	-.13*	-.02	.11					
11. Affective commitment	3.9	.66	.10	.22***	-.01	.13	.06	-.26***	.40***	-.12*	.28***	-.19**				
12. Job satisfaction	4.2	.84	-.03	.22***	-.01	.25***	.07	-.27***	.35***	-.15**	.25***	-.28***	.57***			
13. Trust	3.5	.83	-.06	.09	-.02	.06	.07	-.17**	.69***	-.03	.07	-.18**	.39***	.37***		
14. Intention to quit	1.8	.80	-.01	-.24***	.11	-.09	-.00	.21***	-.31***	-.22***	-.35***	.20**	-.54***	-.79***	-.36***	
15. Perceived performance	3.9	.47	-.01	.16**	.01	.05	-.02	-.10	.19**	-.08	.10	-.15*	.36***	.36***	.21***	-.24***

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level, ** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, * correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

instrumentality ($r = .23$). Duration is related to the controlled motive, indicating that long-duration temporary contracts are less controlled ($r = -.24$). Direct workers score lower on the controlled motive in comparison to indirect workers ($r = .35$). Finally, workers with a higher organizational position were less likely to rate their choice for temporary employment as controlled ($r = -.27$).

The results of the multiple regressions are presented in Table 2. Multicollinearity statistics were checked (tolerance and VIF), and there were no signals for concern. Of the demographic variables, no variable appears to have a systematic influence on the outcome variables in the final model. The independent variable—fairness—is a moderate to strong predictor for all outcome variables. This confirms H1. The stepping-stone motive and the controlled motive are important determinants of affective commitment, job satisfaction, and intention to quit. For trust ($\beta = -.11$) and perceived performance ($\beta = -.16$), only the controlled motive has a predictive value.

In Figs. 1, 2, and 3, ‘high’ and ‘low’ fairness refer to one standard deviation above or below the mean, respectively. Figure 1 shows that the relationship between fairness and perceived performance is especially strong when workers score high on the autonomous motive ($\beta = .22$). Thus, for workers who score high on the autonomous motive for having temporary employment, low fairness is related to lower self-reported performance. Contrary to the predictions

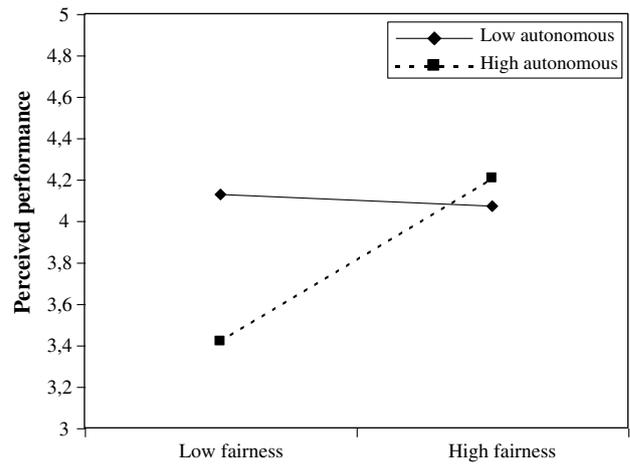


Fig. 1 Graphical representation of the significant interaction effect between fairness and autonomous motive on perceived performance

of H2, the autonomous motive moderates the relation between fairness and perceived performance in such way that the slope of high autonomous motivation is significantly steeper than the slope of low autonomous motivation.

The interaction between fairness and stepping-stone motive is a significant predictor of affective commitment ($\beta = -.10$), job satisfaction ($\beta = -.10$), trust ($\beta = .09$), and intention to quit ($\beta = .13$). Figure 2a–d shows that for workers who use their temporary job as a way to obtain permanent employment, fairness does not predict affective

Table 2 Hierarchical multiple regressions ($n = 299$)

	Affective commitment		Job satisfaction		Trust		Intention to quit		Perceived performance	
Steps 1–3										
1. Gender	.13*	.13**	-.00	-.00	-.01	-.01	-.02	-.02	-.03	-.02
2. Age	.10	.10	.09	.08	.03	.02	-.10	-.11	.10	.11
3. Educational level	-.03	-.03	-.22**	-.21**	.04	.03	.17*	.16*	.01	.01
4. Position	.04	.03	.29***	.28***	-.08	-.06	-.12	-.08	-.01	-.01
5. Contract duration	.03	.03	.00	.00	.01	.00	.01	.00	-.07	-.07
6. Contract form	-.12*	-.12*	-.08	-.09	-.03	-.05	.03	.08	.00	.03
7. Fairness	.36***	.35***	.26***	.25***	.66***	.66***	-.27***	-.26***	.16**	.18**
8. Autonomous	-.02	-.02	-.05	-.05	-.03	-.02	.12*	.13*	-.07	-.08
9. Stepping stone	.25***	.26***	.20***	.21***	.05	.05	-.29***	-.30***	.07	.07
10. Controlled	-.12	-.12*	-.18**	-.18**	-.11*	-.11*	.17**	.17**	-.15*	-.16*
Step 4										
11. Fairness × autonomous		-.02		-.06		-.00		.00		.22***
12. Fairness × stepping stone		-.10*		-.10*		.09*		.13**		.06
13. Fairness × controlled		.01		.02		-.06		-.10*		-.05
R^2	.32	.33	.32	.33	.47	.48	.31	.34	.08	.13
Adj. R^2	.29	.30	.30	.30	.46	.46	.29	.31	.05	.09
F (sig.)	12.9***	10.3***	13.1***	10.5***	24.9***	19.8***	12.4***	10.7***	2.5**	3.0***
R^2 change		.01		.01		.01		.03*		.04**

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level, ** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, * correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

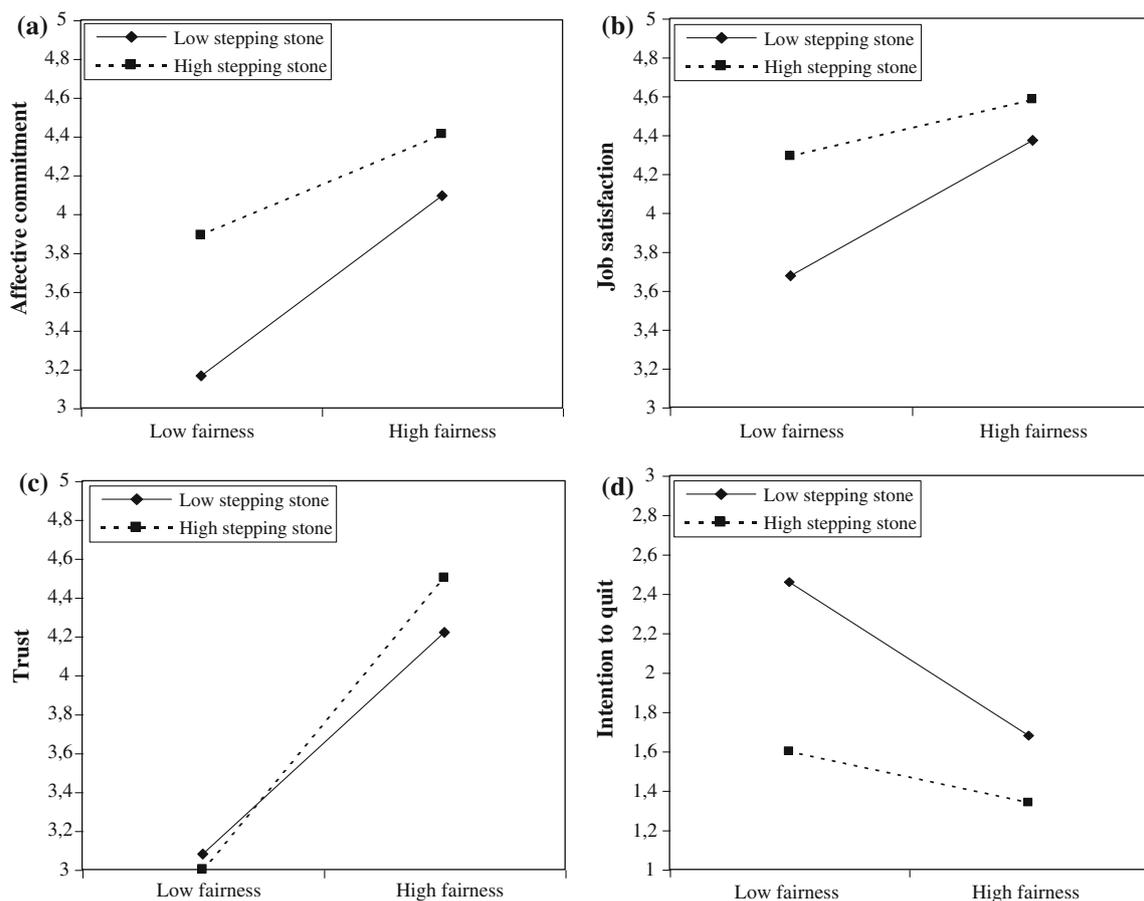


Fig. 2 Graphical representations of the significant interaction effects between fairness and stepping-stone motive on affective commitment (a), job satisfaction (b), trust (c), and intention to quit (d)

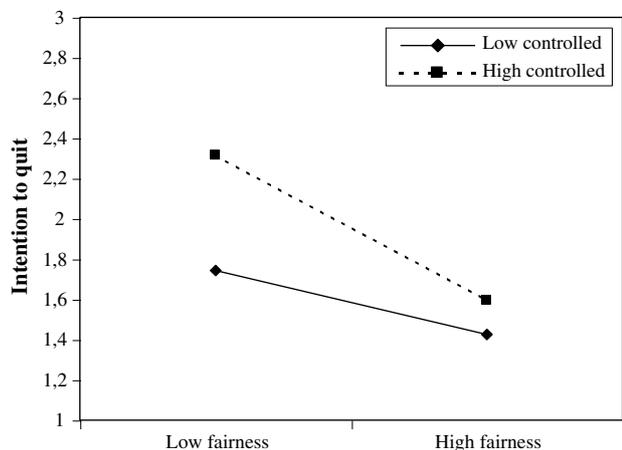


Fig. 3 Graphical representation of the significant interaction effect between fairness and controlled motive on intention to quit

commitment, job satisfaction, or intention to quit; this is in line with the predictions of H3. Trust, however, is strongly relevant to stepping-stone workers. The interaction between fairness and the stepping-stone motive is not significantly related to perceived performance, contrary to H3.

The interaction between fairness and controlled motive is a significant predictor of the intention to quit ($\beta = -.10$). Figure 3 shows the graphical representation of this effect. In line with the hypothesis, fairness has a stronger effect among workers who indicated that they were employed in their temporary job because they did not have a choice. This implies that workers who are involuntarily in a situation of low fairness have a higher intention to quit. The interaction between fairness and controlled motive is not related to the other outcomes, contrary to H4.

Discussion

In this study, we assessed how extrinsic motives for being in a temporary employment relationship moderate the relations between fairness and work-related attitudes and behaviors. The results show that motives can be an important factor affecting the relations between fairness and outcomes. Fairness is less related to attitudes and behavioral intentions among employees who see a temporary job as a means to achieving a goal (permanent

employment), and are not entirely autonomous in their motivation for having temporary employment. This supports the assumption that among workers who use their temporary job to gain permanent employment, fairness is not strongly related to responses. Fairness was less related to commitment, job satisfaction, and intention to quit for workers who score high on the stepping-stone motive.

This suggests that a sense-making mechanism is active (Olson-Buchanan and Boswell 2008), driven by some sense of autonomous choice on the one hand, and explicit positive expectations about the future on the other hand. The importance of a limited sense of autonomous choice can be explained by looking closely at the levels of goal attainment or the chances of achieving the goal. For workers who score high on the autonomous or voluntary motive, the goal of autonomy in employment has already been fulfilled (at least for choosing their current employment contract). In the controlled condition, the need for autonomy is likely not fulfilled in the current job. However, for workers who score high on the stepping-stone motive, need fulfillment is perceived as realistic. They expect to achieve their goal and are therefore positive regarding the future. As mentioned earlier, the expectation of obtaining a permanent contract may serve as a filter in the perception of the employment relationship (Ferguson and Bargh 2004). This would imply that in future research the perception of goal attainment should be considered as an important moderator between perceived fairness in a certain temporary situation and reactions.

The level of goal dependency in the temporary employment relationship may be closely connected to the perceptions of goal attainment. Temporary workers who use their job as a stepping stone are dependent on this job to achieve their desired outcomes (OECD 2002). Because of this dependency on the employer, workers may be unwilling to reciprocate with actions that may harm their chances or position. This adds to the literature that emphasizes the importance of relationship characteristics on perceptions of fairness (Lind and Tyler 1988). In general, unimportant relationships have been found to decrease the importance of fair treatment (e.g., Kwong and Leung 2002). However, such studies generally focus on social relationships characterized by a reciprocal nature. When the relationship is more of a one-way street characterized by dependency—such as in the employment relationship of temporary workers—the moderating effect of relationship importance may be reversed: important relationships may decrease the effect of fair treatment, whereas unimportant relationships increase the effects of fairness. This also creates a potential danger for temporary employees who are dependent on the employer to achieve their goals. Being dependent on another party implies a level of vulnerability that could be consciously or unconsciously

misused. However, due to the goal-oriented motivation and dependency of the temporary employee who scores high on the stepping-stone motive, unfair treatment is not likely to be reciprocated by higher intention to quit or lower organizational commitment. Future research should further explore the impact of relationship and goal dependency on the importance and effects of fair treatment.

The importance of these two conditions—goal attainment and goal dependency—is further underpinned by the absence of structural effects of the other two motives. No buffering effects were found among the workers who reported the autonomous or the controlled motive. On the contrary, according to autonomously motivated workers, self-reported performance behavior is related to fairness. This can be explained by the specific need fulfillment of these workers, which is not dependent on their performance in the temporary job. For workers who use a temporary job to obtain permanent employment, performance is important for sending messages about their competence. For autonomously motivated workers, being treated fairly may be perceived as a bonus, which they reciprocate with higher performance. Finally, the controlled motive has only a small moderating effect, as it moderates only between fairness and intention to quit. This supports our main conclusion that for these workers, a temporary job is not valued as a means to achieve the goal and workers are more inclined to find other employment that may enable them to achieve their goals.

In summary, this study provides support for the researchers who suggest that motives may override automatic responses to fairness (e.g., Bargh 1984; Connelly and Gallagher 2004). Furthermore, our findings show that motives are of some importance in determining work-related outcomes of temporary workers (De Cuyper et al. 2008). More specifically, we found support for suggestions that motives influence reactions to fair treatment perceptions, as proposed by Connelly and Gallagher (2004). With respect to the fairness literature, we found evidence for some restrictions on the importance of fairness as a determinant to work-related attitudes and behavioral intentions: perceptions of goal attainment combined with goal dependency may be two motivational conditions that decrease the effects of fairness on work-related attitudes and behavioral intentions. This supports suggestions by Camerman et al. (2007) who state that the dynamics around fairness perceptions may be different for temporary workers in comparison to their counterparts with permanent contracts.

Limitations

Our study was conducted in multiple organizational settings, which adds to the external validity of the findings.

External validity is limited, on the other hand, by using a single country sample. For example, specific laws that under certain conditions guarantee permanent employment protect Dutch temporary agency workers and fixed-term workers (De Jong and Schalk 2005). This potentially influences the effects found in this study and fuels the need for comparative studies in other contexts.

In addition, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow us to make distinctions between *ex ante* and *ex post* considerations of fairness responses by employees in temporary jobs. Moreover, this design enables us to make a division between ignoring and rationalizing mechanisms to only a limited extent. *Ex post* considerations or rationalizations occur when people find themselves in unexpected situations and consequently modify their preferences, beliefs, and motives in order to justify the current situation (Bonifacio et al. 2003). *Ex ante* considerations occur when the decision maker is already informed, or partially informed, about the course of action after the decision (Cohen et al. 1972). This information, whether it is complete or incomplete, predefines the sets of preferences, beliefs, and motives of employees, which could lead to ignoring fairness in the employment situation. A longitudinal study that includes a comparison between the *ex ante* (e.g., during intake at a temporary employment agency) and *ex post* expectations, preferences, beliefs, and motives would allow for more elaborated conclusions on this important issue.

Furthermore, some limitations with respect to our measures should be taken into account. We opted for a general measure to assess fairness. Recent literature on fairness, however, has focused on three main types of fairness: distributive, procedural, and interactional (Greenberg 1987; Roth and Shanock 2006). Future studies could take these types into account and better specify the coping effects we found in this study. Thibaut and Walker (1975), for example, state that the process toward beneficial outcomes is especially important: people may cope with past or present unfairness when fair procedures in the future are expected to lead to beneficial outcomes. In addition, the single-item measures used to assess motives are vulnerable to over- or underestimation, which may influence reliability (Oshagbemi 1999). The motives used in our study, however, were of extrinsic rather than intrinsic or attitudinal nature, and theoretical arguments and the limited overlap supported the use of single-item measures (Wanous et al. 1997). Future research, however, could assess the influence of using multiple-item measures for temporary worker motives, for example using the measure developed by Tan and Tan (2002). Third, we used a self-reported measure of performance, which has been found to correlate only moderately with supervisor-rated performance measures (Harris and Schaubroeck 1988) and

even lower with objective performance measures (Hoffman et al. 1991). Future research should therefore consider including other measures of performance to obtain a more accurate assessment of employee performance.

Finally, when measuring attitudes both as predictor and as dependent variables, common method bias can occur (Podsakoff et al. 2003). By using another source of data—for example, the supervisor's assessment of the workers' performance—common method bias can be limited in future research.

Implications for Research and Practice

Future research could further explore the boundaries of the motivational conditions depicted in this study, and also look for other moderators stemming from motivation that may confound responses to fairness. Intrinsic motivation, for example, could also affect responses to fairness: preferences for specific tasks may potentially override unfair employment conditions. In addition, the effects of other extrinsic motives for entering temporary employment, including educational possibilities and better pay (Peel and Boxall 2005), could also be assessed.

With respect to the practical implications of our findings, for example with respect to recruitment activities and fair treatment policies, it should be noted that our conclusions do not legitimate unfair treatment, nor do they suggest that only stepping-stone workers should be recruited. Our study did not compare performance indicators of differently motivated temporary workers and did not provide evidence for better performance of stepping-stone workers. Moreover, both legislation and ethical codes prohibit both unfair treatment and discriminative selection procedures. Our results support the use of fair treatment and fair selection procedures because in basically all motivational conditions low perceptions of fairness are accompanied by lower work-related attitudes and behavioral intentions. HR officers and practitioners should therefore, in our opinion, keep emphasizing fair treatment procedures, and pay special attention to those employees who have a vulnerable position with respect to unfair practices because of a stepping-stone motive for having a temporary job.

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