A tenuous link: Psychological contracts and perspective-taking between a promotion agency and its workers

Thomas S. Calvard, Angela J. Carter, Carolyn M. Axtell

Institute of Work Psychology,
Sheffield, UK,
t.calvard@sheffield.ac.uk

Thomas Calvard is currently completing his PhD at the Institute of Work Psychology of the University of Sheffield. The topic of his PhD is employee perspective-taking, with a particular emphasis on diversity. He also has research interests in interdisciplinary working, team learning and intergroup relations.

Abstract

This paper explores the relationships between employees' psychological contract perceptions, perspective-taking between employees and employers, and employees' responses to declining job satisfaction (e.g., absenteeism). Fifteen employees of a promotion agency participated in semi-structured telephone interviews, and their comments were explored qualitatively using template analysis. Employees' work behaviour was related to their perceptions of employers' psychological contract violation and the perspective-taking attempted by both parties. Implications for employment relationships and contingent workers are discussed.

Introduction

Theoretical Background

Just over ten years ago, employees' individual beliefs about their exchanges with their organization was recognised in research as a 'psychological contract' (Rousseau, 1995). As the world of work changes, so too do the connotations of this psychological contract. Specifically, the term can also refer to the move to a 'new deal' in employment, characterized by less security, more flexible career moves and an upsurge in temporary contractual work (Millward & Brewerton, 2000). Newer forms of work are also often carried out remotely, with an increasing reliance on information and communication technologies (ICT) to ensure organizational control and aligned employee interests (Limburg & Jackson, 2007). Promotion campaign work is one example of this type of work where people can earn money flexibly and are employed on an "as needed" basis.

When employees become dissatisfied with the terms of their employment, several responses are possible (Farrell, 1983; Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers & Mainous, 1988). *Job dissatisfaction* has been explored through the well-established framework of the exit, voice, loyalty and neglect *(EVLN) typology* (Farrell, 1983).These dissatisfied responses are defined as: a) *Exit*: to quit or search for a new job; b) *Voice*: to appeal or make constructive suggestions; c) *Loyalty*: sustain their work efforts and hope that conditions will improve; or d) *Neglect*: behave with laxity or disregard.

EVLN responses are made when employees believe their psychological contracts are being violated. Specifically, employees that perceive higher levels of contract violation are found to be more likely to attempt to exit their job, to be neglectful, less loyal or to voice displeasure to management (Turnley & Feldman, 1999). Employees are especially likely to exit when there are attractive alternatives, insufficient justifications for the violation, and they perceive the decision-making processes to be unfair (Turnley & Feldman, 1999). In promotion work, a payment or work difficulty on one campaign, combined with many alternative companies to favour next time, may often evoke responses of exit and/or neglect.

For an employment relationship undermined by dissatisfaction or violation, voice can be regarded as the most desirable response from workers. In the EVLN typology, voice is high on both active and constructive dimensions, whereas absenteeism, lateness, misuse of work time can be passive or destructive (Farrell, 1983). Contract perceptions such as sensemaking, comparison and interpretation mediate between dissatisfaction and deciding which action (EVLN) to take (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Specifically, employees compare their contributions against the company's gestures, and also try to determine whether the company is deliberately *reneging* on a deal, or if there is simply innocuous *incongruence* or misunderstanding (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Employees in their subjectivity are somewhat biased toward taking the company's actions as intentional reneging. This stems from the *fundamental attribution error*; a biased tendency to explain other's actions in terms of their personal traits, rather than their situation (Ross & Ward, 1996). Promotion workers, for example, may automatically label the company as incompetent for waylaying advertising materials, rather than consider alternative situational explanations such as courier breakdown or accident – which are beyond the company's control.

Perspective-taking is defined as the ability to understand the thoughts, feelings and motives of another party's viewpoint (Galinsky, 2002; Galinsky, Ku & Wang, 2005; Parker, Atkins & Axtell, 2008). At work, higher levels of perspective-taking relate to greater helping, extra-role performance, call-centre customer service, and more constructive perceptions of team conflicts (Axtell, Parker, Holman & Totterdell, 2007; Parker & Axtell, 2001; Sessa, 1996).

Often individual employees are likely to use their own predicament as an egocentric anchor, where it takes cognitive effort to serially adjust away from it and take another's viewpoint (Epley, Keysar, Van Boven & Gilovich, 2004). For example, when a promotion worker is uninformed and dissatisfied about a product or promotions venue, they will see their own situation clearly but often fail to account for others or may evaluate their viewpoints less favourably.

Fortunately, perspective-taking can be promoted via information sharing, personal contact and explicitly imagining what another party's thoughts, feelings and intentions are likely to be (Davis, Conklin, Smith & Luce, 1996; Malle, Knobe & Nelson, 2007). Perspective-taking has been shown to reverse the fundamental attribution error (Regan & Totten, 1975). Thus, it may follow that a worker can begin to take into account the organizational constraints surrounding a psychological contract, rather than just focusing on (and blaming) the characteristics of the organization.

Perspective-taking between employees and employers has received relatively little research attention. Yet promotion campaigns often take place far from any central workplace and require appreciative social thinking to solve problems across time and distance.

Figure 1: Proposed model of dissatisfaction, contract perceptions and perspective-taking

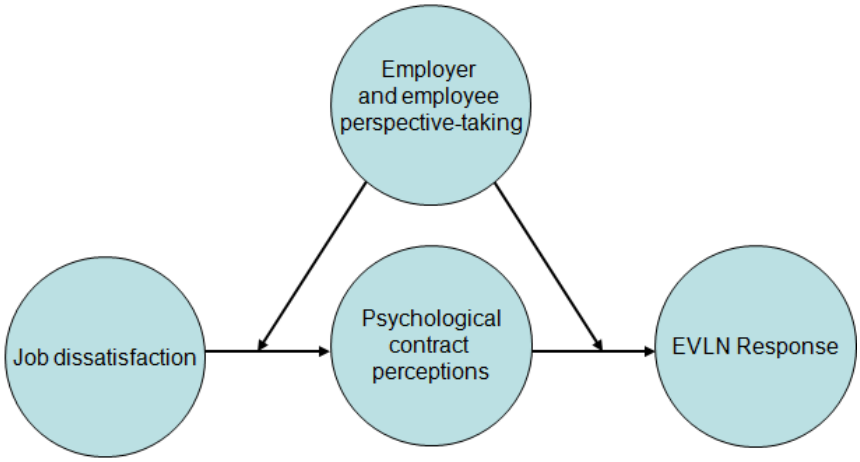

Figure 1 shows the proposed model for the current research. It was expected that perspective-taking efforts are related to the quality of dissatisfaction responses and psychological contract perceptions within an employment relationship. The perspective-taking efforts and abilities, or

lack thereof, evidenced by both employer and employee are important to a shared understanding.

Research Aims

This paper aims to build on and extend existing work on the psychological contract in three main ways. The current study and analysis a) addresses repeated calls for more research into initial contract development (Rousseau, 2001; Turnley & Feldman, 1999); b) considers contract dynamics under relevant, minimalistic 'new deal' conditions; and c) focuses on process (perspective-taking) as well as content, where previous research has been dominated largely by content alone (Millward & Brewerton, 2000). Overall, the research integrates ideas from job satisfaction and psychological contract research using perspective-taking as a social psychological lens.

Research Context

The present research is qualitative in nature, and was conducted in the distinctive setting of a promotions and marketing company in the UK. The company studied, referred to here as *Promote*, has the largest network of promotion staff in the field in the UK, spread across all 70 cities. They work across a wide array of industries and brand leaders within them, including many high-street retail stores, well known travel and leisure companies, internet sites, telecoms and technology products, international fashion brands, cosmetics companies and many food and drink products and services.

Promote acts as a resource for helping its clients plan their marketing strategies; offering staff and services to help with promotion campaigns involving leaflet distribution, field marketing (e.g., product sampling), experiential marketing (e.g., costumed characters), and non-traditional marketing (e.g., promotional vehicles).

The research aimed to explore some of the challenges Promote faced. One particular problem was absenteeism. Promotion workers who had agreed to take on a particular marketing campaign frequently tended to fail to show up on the day of the campaign. If there were multiple absentees, or a designated 'team leader' charged with bringing materials was absent, the consequences were sometimes severe enough for a whole campaign to fail to take place at all. Promote wanted to understand why some workers expressed dissatisfaction with neglect and exit responses (Farrell, 1983).

Employees are recruited via online application forms and may never meet anyone from Promote, instead being contacted and supported for work opportunities predominantly over the phone. Thus, the structure of Promote exemplifies that of a cloverleaf; a dwindling 'core' of operations staff at head office, weakly connected to a vast 'peripheral' network of contract workers (Handy, 1994).

The work done by Promote through its employees is strongly symptomatic of a 'new' employment deal. Large numbers of promotion staff are employed part-time and agree to work in small teams on marketing activities (i.e., leafleting and demonstrating for well-known brands, products and services). A minority of promotions workers remain with such companies for several years, usually where there are recurring or longer-running campaigns. However, most promotions workers view the role as opportunistic, and engage in it temporarily, alongside or as a prelude to more permanent forms of employment. People commonly work for more than one promotional company.

In sum, the context of promotion work is varied, unpredictable and often lacking in steady communication. Thus, it was an appropriate setting for testing theory on perspective-taking, psychological contract violation and job dissatisfaction responses.

Method

Sample and Design

Participants were selected from Promote's database. Given that the questions of interest were open-ended and answers not easily anticipated, we decided to employ a semi-structured interview design. Interviews were conducted by telephone to reach the distributed employees efficiently, and because telephone was the communication medium they were used to in this context.

The sample represented a broad range in age, gender, tenure, type of promotion campaign and absenteeism record. There were 15 participants in total; seven men and eight women. Twelve of the participants were listed as DNAs ("does not arrive") and thus had a track record of more than one illegitimate absence for Promote. The remaining three had no record of absenteeism. Workers ranged in experience from entirely new recruits to individuals who had worked on as many as 10 campaigns over a period of two to three years. Five of the participants had been designated 'team leaders' for their most recent campaigns. This entailed some extra responsibility of bringing materials and being nominally in charge of a group of two or three others. The main characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1, along with ID numbers, which have been used to reference quotes in the results section.

Every participant had been booked to a piece of promotion work for Promote within the three months prior to the study, regardless of whether the work had fallen through or not. Virtually everybody contacted agreed to participate and was working or had worked for other rival promotion companies.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

ID Number	*Gender*	*DNA (Does not arrive) (Y/N)*	*Number of Prior Campaigns with Promote*	*Length of Service (Months)*	*Team Leader (Y/N)*
1	M	Y	10-12	36	N
2	F	Y	1	2	N
3	M	N	3-4	6	N
4	F	Y	1	1	Y
5	M	N	2-3	6	Y
6	F	Y	5-6	12	Y
7	F	N	10	24	Y
8	M	Y	8	24	N
9	F	Y	2-3	6	N
10	M	Y	1	1	N
11	F	Y	1	2	N
12	F	Y	6	3	Y
13	F	Y	1-2	6	N
14	M	Y	6-7	18	N
15	M	Y	2-3	6	N

Interviews

Participants were led through a semi-structured interview schedule (see below). Interviews lasted between 15 and 25 minutes. The interviews were conducted flexibly and iteratively around four broad questions. The questions were sequenced so that relatively more sensitive questions (e.g., absenteeism) were asked later in the schedule, when participants would be likely to feel most comfortable disclosing such information. In some questions, the role of team leader was cued for those workers who had taken this position. These cues are indicated below enclosed in brackets. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured to all participants from the outset. The study was presented to participants as research into 'how to improve the working experiences of promotion workers and their agencies'. The interviews were conducted at such a pace that the first author was able to make detailed notes of the comments of the participants.

The four major questions were as follows:

1. When did you last work for this promotions company and what was the work you did for them? (What did you do as a team leader?) Have you worked for them (as a team leader) before?
2. Describe the experience of working for them. What did you like and what did you not like about the experience?
3. Have you or anyone else on the campaigns you have worked on, ever not turned up for work with this promotion company? Why was this? What was the impact on the piece of work; was this avoidable; what could be done?
4. What other promotional companies do you work for? Is their way of working different to this promotion company? (Can you be specific about team leader activities?) Which do you prefer and why?

It should also be noted that on the second question, further probes were used to help the participant elaborate where necessary. The participants were expected to cover issues of comprehension, feedback, pay practice and contact with the company.

Analysis

Participant comments were analysed by the first author using template analysis (King, 2004).The text of the comments was organised into a hierarchical structure of codes. The initial template simply consisted of four higher-order codes; one corresponding to each of the four major questions outlined above. Second-order codes were typically selected by frequency (i.e., a theme mentioned by three or more individuals), but exceptions were made for emphatic answers judged by the researcher to be subjectively important to the worker. The advantages of this technique are that it is flexible whilst forcing out a disciplined structure from the data and works well for capturing particular group perspectives in organizational contexts (King, 2004).

The analysis is best described as *phenomenological.* This means accounting for responses being shaped by the nature of the interview but also reflecting that the comments made by the respondents partly converge on some shared, valid representations of their wider experiences (King, 2004). Thus, a middle-ground is struck between the idiosyncrasy of the employees' interview experience and the objectivity of the coding to draw out a rich representation of the interactions between the participants and other targets (such as central employees, the organization).

Results

This section summarises promotion workers' comments, dealing with each of the four major questions in turn, and the most relevant aspects of the second-order codes. Particular attention is given to (dis)satisfaction responses, and reflection on the employer-employee interface, or psychological contract perceptions. The overall template or code structure is presented in Figure 2.

Question 1: Types of Work

Firstly, at the outset of the interview, participants were encouraged to talk about the basic work characteristics and types of promotion campaigns they had been involved with for Promote. Eight of the fifteen participants reported that they had mostly been involved with handing out flyers, magazines and promotional materials to the public. Locations cited were a variety of cities and towns across the UK. Ten participants typically reported having worked for Promote for one or two years, taking the odd promotion campaign every three months. Four of these ten reported having worked on six campaigns or more for the company, so some basic loyalty was expressed, but only by about a quarter of the sample. The remaining five had only worked on between one and three occasions.

Two participants commented on campaigns that were slightly more sophisticated demonstrations involving props, costumes and some degree of performance. Two others further mentioned cold canvassing surveys as slightly more detailed sales and marketing tasks.

Figure 2: Final promotion worker template

1) Work Type

1. Leafletting/flyering
2. Costumes
3. Surveys and questions
4. Cold canvassing
5. Promotions/demonstrations

2) The Experience

a) Good

1. Handy, convenient work
2. Enjoyable performance with props
3. Pay can be a good incentive (no emergency tax)
4. Freedom and relaxation elements

b) Bad

1. Solitary photo-taking tasks
2. Lack of props
3. Poor task specification (locale, materials etc.)
4. Pay misspecifications
5. No improvements or expertise feedback
6. Poor awareness of varied nature of jobs
7. Lack of due notice for cancellations
8. Unexpected burdens on the day
9. Lack of beginner support
10. Feelings of disrespect (mutual)

3) Reasons and Impact of DNAs (Do Not Arrive)

1. Geographical uncertainty or displeasure
2. Misspecifications may render work pointless/degraded
3. Doubts on ethical grounds, 'faceless' relationship
4. What is the job exactly?
5. Confused responsibility
6. Miscommunication
7. Other jobs took priority
8. Can't be bothered
9. Payback; resentment
10. 'Take the Mickey' attitude
11. ‘Pull sick’ for undesirable days

4) Competitors, Preferences and Suggestions

1. The way they pay
2. Choice or input into the job(s)
3. Professional, timely contact
4. Good scheduling and supplies
5. In-person support and geographical research
6. Recruitment of better clients
7. Varied tasks
8. Good teams reunited
9. Head office briefings
10. Thorough, friendly communication

Interestingly, in terms of initial psychological contract perceptions, three participants cited work that had fallen through or they had decided not to take, and two of these individuals were new to promotion work (ID 10 and ID 11). Examining the comments more closely, it appears that 'cold feet' and uncertainty may make novel employees dissatisfied and steer them towards an exit response.

The employer may need to empathise more and take the perspective of a worker more closely in these situations than was the case here. For example, one worker could not make sense of the materials she had been sent: "They sent me aerial photos of an area and some postcodes, but I couldn't for the life of me see how these related to what I would be doing" (ID 4). Another worker commented: "They thought I was booked, but they also told me I might not be needed and I didn't turn up because I never received proper confirmation" (ID 10). The employers were frequently cited as "they", indicating these workers' sense of distance and discrimination (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

Question 2: Pros and Cons of the Work Experience

Secondly, participants were asked to describe their most recent promotion job for Promote in more detail, with reference to what they felt were the major pros and cons. Participants varied in their evaluations of working for this employer. Six expressed 'generally positive' feelings about Promote and intended to work for them again (IDs 1, 6, 7, 8, 13 and 15); four were critical over work processes but relatively indifferent (IDs 2, 5, 9, and 11); the remaining five described long-standing problems and 'generally negative' evaluations of their employer. For the present purposes, examples of positive and negative scenarios provide further insights.

On the positive side, two long-standing employees described a good understanding between themselves and the employer over how to get the most out of the work and do a good job at the same time. "There is recognition of the fact that the work should involve elements of freedom and relaxation, as well as seeing new places and meeting new people" (ID 8). Similarly, another male worker explained how "this work has been a handy way for me to raise money as a student, there have never been any annoying tax problems with my pay that you sometimes get with other companies, and I've been given the opportunity to work at the centre of some colourful and lively promotion campaigns, which have been fun and satisfying to be involved in" (ID 1).

Consistent with the proposed model, both these participants described a shared perspective, voice behaviours and a sense of empathy. When probed about disadvantages, the first male participant replied "I understand the nature of the work from the company's point of view. It's very competitive; and there's a need to cooperate in the face of demanding clients at short notice" (ID 1). The other participant remarked "I think it's usual for head office to have to deal with frequent changes of staff and inevitable areas of disorganization" (ID 8). An example of voice behaviour is captured in the quote: "I wish there were more jobs with more varied tasks than leafleting sometimes. I've fed this back before and I think there will be more opportunity in the future to help develop the attractive sides of the campaigns" (ID 8).

On the negative side, five participants described similar problems in their promotion jobs; generally accompanied by a breakdown in perspective-taking and understanding. Major causes for dissatisfaction included pay and feedback problems. "I found the work at times quite demanding and wanted to ask how did we do? Or how can we improve? But there has been no opportunity for me to do that" recalled a female participant (ID 12). Another participant described a particularly heated dispute with the company over a geographical location: "They had no idea where I was; the region was miserably empty and the campaign clearly hadn't been researched properly. My concerns seemed to fail to register with them and there were doubts raised about whether I should be paid; they just had no idea of my situation" (ID 3).

Dissatisfaction with pay and notice provided more evidence of mutual withdrawal and neglect responses, coupled with psychological contract violation and a lack of empathy. A female participant new to the world of promotion work described how the company: "seemed faceless and potentially illegitimate. They were taking my personal details, promising me information up front but instead only giving me last minute warnings to prepare from poor quality materials. I won't work for them again" (ID 4). "I don't feel respected and I feel exploited. I have had to chase pay issues, and have not been paid adequately" complained another worker (ID 14). Finally, a female participant expressed problems symptomatic of poor perspective-taking: "I feel

things are bad when it gets casual, and neither side feels responsible for explaining their situation; there's just an attitude of 'oops!' over pay delays, waylaid materials, vague job details and the like" (ID 9).

Question 3: Absenteeism

Thirdly, participants were specifically asked if they themselves and/or other workers had failed to turn up for a promotional piece of work, and the circumstances surrounding the absenteeism. Absenteeism tended to be viewed as a neglectful, dissatisfied response, consistent with expectations. One participant (ID 9) described how absenteeism is a self-serving strategy for some workers; i.e., apply to several jobs and turn up for favourite one, or call in sick on a particularly tough day's work.

Reasons cited for absenteeism included: bad weather conditions, inability to find geographical locations, doing other promotion work, unexpected demands/workload and misunderstanding. Participants generally expressed dissatisfaction with communication, undesirable tasks (e.g., working in a rough/secluded area) and a lack of perspective-taking from Promote. One woman commented: "I had to dispense information aimed at people with reading difficulties, which meant approaching people I thought might have this problem, and it felt ill-thought out. There simply has to be some consideration given to these things at their end" (ID 7).

The sense of mutual obligation was put across by a male promotion worker: "I would say absenteeism works on a campaign-by-campaign basis. If they mess me around with booking notice, pay and weird tasks, I will mess them around back. On the other hand, where they have respected my needs, I have felt obliged to be honest, not to take the Mickey, and to do a decent job" (ID 14).

Question 4: Competitors and Best Practice

The fourth and final question concerned participants' thoughts on other promotional companies, the variety of practices used in this field, and explanations of which features they preferred the most. In keeping with the transactional nature of the work, five participants explained briefly that all they wanted was to be paid as quickly as possible and always on time (IDs 1, 2, 6, 7, and 10).

The remaining ten participants consistently made comments that can be interpreted as expressing a need for more relational elements in the contracted work. Companies were generically described in terms of how they ranged along this continuum. Typically, the promotion workers said how they wanted more expanded pieces of work, more contact, professionalism in the way work was paid and scheduled, and for like-minded people to be given the chance to work together again.

In relation to other companies, one interviewee said: "The top promotion companies and campaigns are timely and efficient. I had a month-long project where they were always spot on with more supplies, in-person support, task scheduling and even free gifts and perks" (ID 5). By contrast, in criticism of Promote, another interviewee said: "I wish they had more jobs and random tasks than it being leafleting nearly all the time. They should pull us together a bit more. Good teams should work again. We should talk about structure, concrete times and places" (ID 8). The latter comment seems to make use of multiple 'us', 'we' and 'they' pronouns; perhaps as a result of a confused need to feel belonging towards something socially in the work (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

As well as evidence that employees' psychological contract perceptions relate to their (dis)satisfaction, three participants mentioned the perspective-taking possibilities between promotions employers and employees. In terms of employers' perspective-taking, one participant said: "More clear and reassuring communication is always appreciated. If they ring me an hour before and let me know things are going to plan, it shows they are in synch with me" (ID 11). Similarly from a female participant: "The employers need to work on getting the best clients and the tasks that most appeal to me. The best companies have a cool and funky reputation, and a sense of the varied roles and fun workers look for" (ID 9).

Workers talked explicitly about taking the perspective of the people working in the main office: "I know the people who book the jobs at head office have a tough job; and I suppose the

successful enterprises depend partly on central staff being treated better rather than lynched every time something goes wrong" (ID 8).

In sum, the analysis presented here demonstrates broad support for the associative sequence proposed in Figure 1. That is, employees can encounter dissatisfaction in many ways when performing uncertain work, and they will perceive contract violation very early on. They then will try to respond with some loyalty and voice behaviour, but where the means for these responses are limited, they will typically respond in terms of exit and neglect. Perspective-taking, reciprocally between employers and employees, can act as a buffer throughout this negative cycle. Giving closer consideration to the viewpoints, needs, intentions, and feelings of others facilitates more compromising relational contract perceptions, as well as promoting more constructive responses to job dissatisfaction.

Discussion

The main finding of this study is that where a promotions company fails to take its employees' perspectives, negative work behaviours emerge. Employee perspectives on pay/rewards, autonomy, advancement and social atmosphere (i.e., contract perceptions) need to be acknowledged so they are not seen as violated. There is also some evidence for the idea that where employees feel they are supported, they will reciprocally take the perspective of the employer and exhibit positive behaviours of loyalty and voice.

The research generalises to any organization that outsources all of its major operations. An employment relationship made up of nothing more than a website and a smattering of phone calls may be one that has gotten ahead of itself.

Recommendations to the Company

Employees have different values, and will seek corresponding information about these values being satisfied in their psychological contract perceptions (De Vos, Buyens & Schalk, 2005). One implication is that employers should be quick to seek feedback on these values, so that they can understand the most salient aspects of their employees' experiences through sincere, constructive voicing of pros and cons.

For the sake of some inconvenience in terms of time and money, the findings also suggest that some human touch and more contact are vital. One key moderator of how employees respond to satisfaction within exchange relationships is investment size (Rusbult et al., 1988). Investments in employees in the traditional employment relationship, such as generous long-term retirement funds, may have had their day. However, the company can make simple investments that will still have an impact, such as rudimentary training and social events.

It has been argued that to elicit performance freely from workers, it is important to utilise positive feedback, recognise the value of fun, and to persuade, not manipulate (Fielder, 2006). The research has particularly strong implications for recruitment and retention practices. For the company studied here or any organization with a flexible workforce, the employer can reach out by sharing information with candidates at recruitment fairs, holding head office tours or open days, and awarding extra responsibility to its most long-standing workers.

Some of the most practical work problems were caused by frantic phone calls, last minute garbled materials and even a 'faceless' organization. E-mails and infrequent phone calls are often referred to as 'lean communication'. Lean communication can undermine the potential for perspective-taking and any ongoing beneficial negotiation (Gelfand et al., 2006). Debate is still raging over the insensitivity of text messaging at work (Brockett, 2006). More structured, formal means of communication that enhance remote workers' grasp of their employers' perspective are recommended wherever possible. An example of this might be a richer telephone protocol that covers frequently encountered problems and contingency plans.

Overall, it is important for employers to take their workers voiced perspectives, particularly early on in the employment relationship, to avoid immediate dissatisfied exit responses. The employer was clearly often unaware that the workers were in doubt, or even receiving contradictory information. Employees in turn need to know that the employer is 'doing all it can' to avoid blame and start to care about welfare and needs on both sides (Batson, Eklund,

Chermok, Hoyt & Ortiz, 2007). The workers 'out in the field' are a valuable source of information for the employer to acknowledge and learn from at every available opportunity.

Reflections on the Research

The results found here begin to answer the question of how to promote mutual perspective-taking so that problems like absenteeism can be avoided in temporary workforces. Temporary workforces often involve psychological contracts so basically transactional in format that any valuable relational elements drop away.

A *transactional* contract is one focused on easy-to-exit, well-specified agreements of very limited duration. Transactional contracts by their very nature foster little commitment or high-performance behaviour in employees, and exist in contrast to longer-term, more collaborative *relational* contracts (Rousseau, 1995). Transactional exchanges often involve strategic deception and an exploitative mindset, particularly if a joint information state is not reached (Goffman, 1970).

On the other hand, *relational* contract elements include intense socialization, realistic job previews and clear, timely communication (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). These elements are crucial to ensure some minimal shared perspective, so the work itself and the goals of the work can be trusted and respected. Future research could aim to quantitatively assess how accurately employers understand the motives, intentions and feelings of their temporary employees and how this provokes various forms of employee behaviour.

The study also lends credence to the argument that employees adjust their contributions in response to their satisfaction with the contract. If they are dissatisfied and cannot appreciate why their employers have let this happen, a "love me or lose me" absenteeism/exit response is to be expected (Deery, 2005). For voice and loyalty responses to occur, employees need to be able to openly weigh up what they are doing for the company versus what the company is doing for them (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

The promotion workers with longer company tenure made some reference to the difficulties of its situation. This is evidence of perspective-taking with the organization; the employees' reversing their fundamental attribution error to socially appreciate the constraints underlying the employer perspective. This study links this perspective-taking to voice; airing ideas about helping to make the work processes better for all concerned. Future longitudinal research could usefully track how perspective-taking, trust and cooperation matures within contract employees who stick around for longer.

In conclusion, contract workers face a tension between enjoying enormous freedom and wanting to belong to work socially (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). At best, this can be managed with fun, flexibility and professionalism. At worst, it can create meaningless and even abusive working conditions. Employing contingent and temporary workers is typically assumed to be an initiative that yields greater efficiency. However, this efficiency may never come to fruition without a basic foundation of mutual understanding.

References

Axtell, C., Parker, S., Holman, D., & Totterdell, P. (2007). Enhancing Customer Service: Perspective Taking in a Call Centre. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 36,* 213-245.

Batson, C., Eklund, J., Chermok, V., Hoyt, J., & Ortiz, B. An Additional Antecedent of Empathic Concern: Valuing the Welfare of the Person in Need. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93, 65-74.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117,* 497-529.

Brewer, M. B., & Gardner, W. (1996). Who is This "We"? Levels of Collective Identity and Self Representations. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 71, 83-93.

Brockett, J. (2006). Let's talk about text. *People Management, 12 (17), 16-17.*

Davis, M. H., Conklin, L., Smith, A., & Luce, C. (1996). Effect of Perspective-Taking on the Cognitive Representation of Persons: A Merging of Self and Other. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70,* 713-726.

Deery, S. (2005). Love me or lose me. *People Management, 11 (23),* 36-37.

De Vos, A., Buyens, D., & Schalk, R. (2005). Making Sense of a New Employment Relationship: Psychological Contract-Related Information Seeking and the Role of Work Values and Locus of Control. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 13,* 41-52.

Epley, N., Keysar, B., Van Boven, L., & Gilovich, T. (2004). Perspective Taking as Egocentric Anchoring and Adjustment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 87,* 327-339.

Farrell, D. (1983). Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect as Responses to Job Dissatisfaction: A Multidimensional Scaling Study. *Academy of Management Journal, 26,* 596-607.

Fielder, R. (2006). Unlock discretionary effort. *People Management, 12 (20),* 44-45.

Galinsky, A. D. (2002). Creating and Reducing Intergroup Conflict: The Role of Perspective-Taking in Affecting Outgroup Evaluations. *Toward Phenomenology of Groups and Group Membership, 4,* 85-113.

Galinsky, A. D., Ku, G., & Wang, C. S. (2005). Perspective-Taking and Self-Other Overlap: Fostering Social Bonds and Facilitating Social Coordination. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations,* 8, 109-124.

Galinsky, A. D., & Moskowitz, G.B. (2000). Perspective-Taking: Decreased Stereotype Expression, Stereotype Accessibility, and In-group Favouritism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 78*, 708-724.

Gelfand, M. J., Major, V. S., Raver, J. L., Nishii, L. H., & O'Brien, K. (2006). Negotiating Relationally: The Dynamics of the Relational Self in Negotiations. *Academy of Management Review, 31,* 427-451.

Goffman, E. (1970). *Strategic Interaction.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Handy, C. B. (1994). *The Empty Raincoat.* London: Hutchinson.

King, N. (2004). Using Templates in the Thematic Analysis of Text. In C. Cassell & G. Symon (Eds.) *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research.* London: Sage.

Limburg, D., & Jackson, P.J. (2007). Teleworkflow: Supporting Remote Control with Workflow Management Systems. *New Technology, Work and Employment, 22,* 146-167.

Malle, B. F., Knobe, J. M., & Nelson, S. E. (2007). Actor-Observer Asymmetries in Explanations of Behavior: New Answers to an Old Question. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 93,* 491-514.

Millward, L. J., & Brewerton, P. M. (2000). Psychological Contracts: Employee Relations for the Twenty-First Century? In G. Hodgkinson & K. Ford (Eds.) *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Vol. 15*. Chichester: Wiley.

Morrison, E. W., & Robinson, S. L. (1997). When Employees Feel Betrayed: A Model of how Psychological Contract Violation Develops. *Academy of Management Review, 22,* 226-256.

Parker, S.K., Atkins P.W.B., & Axtell, C.M. (2008). Building Better Workplaces Through Individual Perspective-Taking: A Fresh Look at a Fundamental Human Process. In G. Hodgkinson & K. Ford (Eds.) *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Vol. 20*. Chichester: Wiley.

Parker, S.K., & Axtell, C.M. (2001). Seeing Another Viewpoint: Antecedents and Outcomes of Employee Perspective-Taking. *Academy of Management Journal, 44,* 1085-1100.

Regan, D. T. & Totten, J. (1975). Empathy and Attribution: Turning Observers into Actors. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 32,* 850-856.

Ross, L., & Ward, A. (1996). Naive Realism in Everyday Life: Implications for Social Conflict and Misunderstanding. In T. Brown, E. Reed, & E. Turiel (Eds.), *Values and Knowledge.* Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Rousseau, D. (1995). *Psychological Contracts in Organizations: Understanding Written and Unwritten Agreements.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rousseau, D. (2001). Schema, Promise and Mutuality: The Building Blocks of the Psychological Contract. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 74,* 511-541.

Rusbult, C.E., Farrell, D., Rogers, G., & Mainous, A.G. (1988). Impact of Exchange Variables on Exit, Voice, Loyalty and Neglect: An Integrative Model of Responses to Declining Job Satisfaction. *Academy of Management Journal, 31,* 599-627.

Sessa, V. I. (1996). Using Perspective Taking to Manage Conflict and Affect in Teams. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 32,* 101-115.

Turnley, W., & Feldman, D. (1999). The Impact of Psychological Contract Violations on Exit, Voice, Loyalty and Neglect. *Human Relations, 52,* 895-922.