

## THE MARGINAL TEMP SYNDROME: PREDICTING JOB PERFORMANCE AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIORS

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This chapter presents a useful framework for employers that use temporary workers. It draws on a theoretical framework to explain how and why certain temporary workers are better than others. It identifies specific factors that can identify types of temporary workers. Employers and temporary help agencies using this framework will be able to predict whether the temporary workers will be only marginal performers before they are placed on assignments with host employers.

Temporary workers employed by temporary help agencies are an increasingly important part of the U.S. labor force (Hipple, 2001). Some of the nation's largest employers (e.g., Kelly Services, Manpower) are temporary employment agencies with hundreds of thousands of temps on their payrolls (Feldman, Doeringhaus, & Turnley, 1995). These agencies are usually the actual legal employer of temporary employees. They handle hiring, payroll, record-keeping, and related functions. The "temps" hired by the agency usually work at another employer's worksite. This employer is called the "host" employer.

Much of the literature on temporary workers focuses on the benefits of using temporary workers because of the flexibility the temps provide to the host employers. Furthermore, employees who voluntarily work in temporary jobs often experience reduced job strain and higher job satisfaction (Bauer & Truxillo, 2000; Parker, Griffin, Sprigg, & Wall, 2002).



However, most people accept temporary work involuntarily because they are unable to find permanent full-time employment (Ellingson, Gruys, & Sackett, 1998). Many are unable to find work because they performed poorly in school or in their previous job. Therefore, employers are less likely to hire them as permanent employees (Gannon & Brainin, 1971). This raises a concern for host employers because many temporary agencies do not thoroughly screen their applicants. A national survey of temporary agencies ( $N = 691$ ) indicated that only 53% require applicants to list their previous places of employment and fewer than 42% verify applicant employment histories (Allen, Sompayrac, & White, 2002). Thus, even though temporary workers often have problematic work histories, many temporary agencies fail to evaluate those histories before placing these workers at host organizations.

Unfortunately, almost no research has identified the factors that predict productive and counterproductive performance by temporary workers at host employer worksites. Therefore, this chapter seeks to understand the work history etiology of temporary workers by identifying the biographical patterns that distinguish Marginal Temps from Satisfactory Temps. This will enhance our understanding of temporary worker phenomenology. Furthermore, few studies have identified the criterion-related validity of selection methods that predict counterproductive behavior for any type of worker (Salgado, Viswesvaran, & Ones, 2001). Therefore, a secondary purpose of this chapter is to inform temporary agencies, host employers, and consultants about potentially valid predictors of temporary worker counterproductive behavior. We distinguish Satisfactory Temps from Marginal Temps in terms of those biographical factors.

### The Ecology Perspective and the Marginal Temp Syndrome

#### Ecology Perspective

The Ecology perspective provides a useful framework to analyze the relationships between temporary workers' work history, job performance, and counterproductive behaviors. This perspective is used to distinguish two types of workers: Marginal Temps and Satisfactory Temps. Specific propositions drawn from the Ecology perspective explain how an Ecology perspective predicts worker classification into these two categories.

The Ecology perspective is a theoretical framework that uses biographic and work history factors to analyze workers. It predicts that individuals are formed through repeated exposure to life events in which they make choices that will maximize personal rewards (Gustafson & Mumford, 1995). Over time, relatively stable and observable patterns of individual differences emerge (Mumford, Stokes, & Owens, 1990). These patterns of indi-

vidual differences result from the repeated interaction of individuals with their environment in a manner that enables them to adapt to the opportunities available to them.

This adaptation that results in stable patterns of individual differences can explain differences among temporary workers. While some people choose to work in temp jobs, many others who have problematic work histories will seek work at a temporary agency because of the potential to find employment even though the rewards are more limited and the work less desirable (Barker, 1995). Thus, through repeated exposure to events in their work histories they have adapted to the job market opportunities offered by temporary help agencies. They are motivated to accept temporary jobs because permanent jobs are not available to them (Polivka, 1996). The perceptions and goals of Marginal Temps are based on their prior negative work histories, their backgrounds, and the likelihood that temporary work is preferable to no work at all (Booth, Francesconi, & Frank, 2002).

#### Marginal Temp Syndrome

We identify a new concept called the "Marginal Temp Syndrome." A unifying model is used to identify one category of temporary workers—those who exhibit the characteristics of Marginal Temp Syndrome. These workers can be identified by a cluster of symptoms and signs related to their work history. Propositions about the nature of the clusters of variables that identify the syndrome are developed.

The Marginal Temp Syndrome is a motivational explanation for the work histories of Marginal Temps. People who have been affected by the syndrome have been involuntarily unemployed and, over time, are chronically underemployed (Feldman, Doeringhaus, & Turnley, 1995). Their behaviors are influenced by work motivation that has been shaped by repeated exposure to events at work. They work as temps even though markers of their ability levels such as years of experience and education suggest that they are qualified to hold permanent jobs. Yet, they are not offered those better paying permanent jobs because they have fallen into a repetitive pattern of poor work behaviors (Labig, Helburn, & Rodgers, 1985). They have drifted down the job market ladder into the type of work that temporary agencies offer (Booth, Francesconi, & Frank, 2002). They exist at the lower margin of the job market and thus can be characterized as Marginal Temps. They have adjusted their expectations and goals to match the available opportunities in the job market.

Other individuals who apply for temp jobs prefer the shorter hours or short-term assignments of temporary work (Morris & Vekker, 2001). They have chosen to seek temporary work and are more likely to be the Satis-



factory Temps. This is consistent with prior research by Ellingson et al. (1998). That study found negative (but not statistically significant) correlations between being involuntarily employed as a temp and both job performance ( $r = -.13$ ,  $N = 163$ ) and supplementary performance ( $r = -.23$ ,  $N = 66$ ). These correlations may not have been statistically significant because of the relatively low power (less than the .80 standard suggested by Cohen, 1988) because of the relatively small sample size. However, these correlations are consistent with the idea that those who have no alternative to temporary jobs will not perform as well as others.

Thus, there are two distinct types of temporary workers. The first group is the Marginal Temps—those who are affected by and show the symptoms of Marginal Temp Syndrome. The second group is the Satisfactory Temps. The Marginal Temps are forced to apply for temp jobs because of prior bad experience in the job market. They need to work to support themselves or their families, so they seek job opportunities where they are likely to get some income (Bernasek & Kinnear, 1999). Employers with regular full-time job openings are less likely to hire them because of their poor work record. We propose that the regular jobs are not offered to them because the employers see something in the Marginal Temps work history that suggests they will be problematic employees.

While some people follow career paths that enable them to move up in the world, others follow a downward trajectory. Satisfactory Temps perform well and earn pay raises, promotions, and offers of better jobs. Marginal Temps try to get by with poor job performance, cutting corners, breaking rules; and although this is easier in the short run, eventually it catches up with them. They lose their jobs, cannot find permanent jobs so they drift into the only jobs available, temporary jobs (Feldman, Doeringhaus, & Turnley, 1995).

### Research Propositions: Marginal Temp Syndrome

There are several different types of indicators of the Marginal Temp Syndrome. Some are work history (e.g., laid off from last job), some are demographic (e.g., sex), and some are the consequences of unsuccessful work histories (e.g., willingness to accept any kind of work). Table 1 illustrates the work history factors that distinguish marginal temps from satisfactory temps.

It is expected that the Marginal Temp Syndrome can be identified using work history factors and then related to two distinct types of work performance: job performance and counterproductive behaviors. Job performance refers to behaviors that are part of a worker's assigned duties and responsibilities. It is an overall rating of job performance. Counterproductive behaviors refer to performance that is contrary to the interests of

the organization (Campbell, McCloy, Oppler, & Sager, 1993). Counterproductive behaviors include theft, misuse of time, substance abuse, and violating safety rules (Hollinger & Clark, 1983). Unlike Contextual Performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993) in which individuals go beyond the duties required by their jobs, counterproductive behaviors actually interfere with the performance of core job functions. In other words, counterproductive behaviors are the antithesis of contextual performance.

Those who have lost their jobs are more likely to be unemployed because of poor work performance. Prior research suggests that low worker productivity is related to a higher probability that workers will be laid off or fired (Bishop, 1990). The pattern of losing one's job because of poor performance on a prior job can carry over into future jobs. For example, Malouff and Schutte's (1986) study of police officers found that being fired was related to lower job performance in the future. However, very few studies examine whether the circumstances under which a person left a job accurately predicts future job performance. Researchers usually study voluntary turnover as part of the criterion domain. Here it is proposed that voluntarily leaving one's last job is an indicator of future job performance in subsequent employment.

Applicants who report that they had been laid off from their previous job are expected to have lower job performance and more counterproductive behaviors in the future. There are several reasons for this. First, laid off individuals are by definition not currently working. Recent reports suggest that employers are now more likely to use job performance rather than seniority to determine which employees will be laid off (Tejada, 2001). Thus, the Satisfactory Temp group is more likely to include people who are currently working because they have performed well enough on their current jobs that their employer keeps them on the payroll. Those who have been laid off have not performed well enough for their employer

**Table 1**  
Marginal vs. Satisfactory Temps: Predictors and Outcomes

Classification of Temporary Workers	Pre-Hire Predictors	Work Outcomes	
	Work History Factors	Work Performance	Counterproductive Work Performance
Marginal Temps	Involuntary laid off or terminated from last job; more tenure as a temp, more years of education; availability for shift-work and weekends; open on salary demands	Poor: lower levels of work output and poor work quality	More absenteeism, more lateness, more careless work, more safety infractions
Satisfactory Temps	Still working or voluntarily quit; higher prior salary	Good: higher levels of work output and good quality	Less absenteeism, less tardiness, more careful work, fewer safety infractions



to continue their employment (Bishop, 1990). Second, the term "laid off" implies that the worker is out of a job because of some reason unrelated to his or her job performance. However, often this is not the case. Instead, the laid off worker's job performance was poor and rather than formally terminate or discharge the worker, the employer simply told the worker that the lay off was due to lack of work or some other reason (Hwang, 2002). Third, the worker may have been fired because of poor work performance and the employers agreed, as part of a separation agreement, that they would tell future employers that he or she had been laid off (Stybel & Peabody, 2001). Because a worker who has been laid off is more likely to find another job, the prior employer's potential legal liability would be lessened.

*Proposition 1:* Involuntarily leaving the last job will be negatively related to job performance and positively related to counterproductive behavior.

Under the Ecology perspective, individual life patterns develop over time and result in stable differences into the future. Data from the current population survey suggest that 72% of employees working for a temporary agency have worked for the agency for less than one year (Cohany, 1996). However, Marginal Workers who have Marginal Temp Syndrome are likely to remain as temporary workers longer than others because they are unable to find regular full time jobs. Of course, tenure as a temporary worker does not always mean the same thing as tenure in regular jobs. Someone working for a temporary agency can be on the agency's list of employees for many years, with the same host employer, or moving from one host employer to another. Often this pattern can be interrupted by periods of unemployment. Those with the Marginal Temp Syndrome are more likely to remain on the temporary agency records for much longer. Although some long-term temps are voluntarily working as temps, most research suggests that the majority of temps would prefer regular full time employment (Cohany, 1996). Thus, longer tenure suggests that the individual has not adapted to the job market. For example, Ellingson et al. (1998) found a small negative correlation between the number of months worked as a temporary and an overall rating of job performance of temporary workers. Thus, those who exhibit the Marginal Temp Syndrome will have more time as temporary workers and will be more likely to have poorer job performance and manifest more counterproductive behaviors.

*Proposition 2:* More tenure as a temporary worker will relate to lower job performance and more counterproductive behaviors.

Research suggests that better-performing employees are less likely to be laid off or fired (Bishop, 1990). As a corollary, temporary workers who are still working or who have quit their past jobs (as opposed to being laid

off) are viewed by employers as deserving of higher pay and longer employment. These people are more likely to be Satisfactory Temps than Marginal Temps.

*Proposition 3:* Those who are still working or who quit their past jobs will have higher job performance and fewer counterproductive behaviors than those who were not currently working or voluntarily left their last jobs.

Research suggests that workers with better job performance receive higher salaries (Ferris, Witt, & Hochwater, 2001). Thus, temporary workers with a high prior salary have been judged by their former employers as good workers. They are more likely to be Satisfactory Temps than Marginal Temps. Thus, they will have higher job performance and fewer counterproductive behaviors.

*Proposition 4:* Salary on last job will be positively related to job performance and negatively related to counterproductive behaviors.

The literature suggests that the more years of education that temporary workers have, the more likely they are to prefer a permanent job to a temporary job (Bernasek & Kinnear, 1999). Thus, individuals with more years of education accept temporary work because it is the only employment that they can find. For high school graduates, a temporary clerical job may be a good match with their qualifications and expectations. But for many workers with some college, working as a temp suggests they are underemployed because their work history has shown that they are less successful in the job market.

*Proposition 5:* More years of education will have a negative relationship to job performance and a positive relationship to counterproductive behaviors.

The more shifts and work schedules the applicant is willing to work, the more valuable the applicant will be to a temporary employment agency because they can be placed in many different job situations. For some temporary workers this is a sign of flexibility. However, the Ecology perspective implies that willingness to work on odd days or shifts results from a forced adaptation to a poor work history. Thus, applicants with poor work histories have been induced to apply through a temporary agency, but they might not be hired unless they indicate a willingness to work weekends, or second or third shifts. Nevertheless, after they are hired, their work performance will still be driven by their personal characteristics and established work habits. Thus, the Ecology model predicts that applicants who indicate greater availability are doing so because they have been conditioned to say that they are willing to accept this less desirable work. In essence, the Ecology model predicts that the applicants who are more available will be poorer performers after hire.



*Proposition 6:* Applicant availability to work less desirable shifts (e.g., nights or weekends) will relate to lower job performance and more counterproductive behaviors.

Information about a job applicant's desired salary or minimum acceptable salary can also be an important indicator of the Marginal Temp Syndrome. When asked about desired salary, the applicants might specify a salary, or state that they are "open" or that their salary expectations are "negotiable." Stating "open" or "negotiable" is consistent with applicants who are attempting to compensate for a poor work history. Such applicants might not be hired unless they indicate a willingness to be open or negotiable in their salary requirements. Nevertheless, after they are hired, their work performance will still be driven by negative work habits. Thus, the Ecology model predicts that applicants who indicate a greater openness or flexibility in their salary demands have been conditioned to do so. Thus, stating "open" on a salary request on an application form will predict lower job performance and more counterproductive behaviors

*Proposition 7:* Applicants who indicate that they are "open" on their minimally acceptable salary are likely to have lower job performance and exhibit more counterproductive behaviors after they are hired.

There will be stable individual differences between two types of temporary workers: Satisfactory Temps and Marginal Temps who are afflicted by the Marginal Temp Syndrome. The latter will exhibit lower job performance and more counterproductive behaviors. These stable individual differences can be predicted by biographic identifiers of the Marginal Temp Syndrome. In addition there should be significant relationships between these biographical identifiers, and they will cluster together to yield two groups of temporary employees.

*Proposition 8:* Two clusters of workers (Marginal Temps and Satisfactory Temps) can be identified on the basis of biographical information.

*Proposition 9:* The two clusters will exhibit different levels of job performance and counterproductive behaviors. Marginal Temps will have lower job performance and more counterproductive behaviors than Satisfactory Temps.

### Discussion

Drawing upon an Ecology framework, this chapter identifies two different groups of temporary workers: Marginal Temps and Satisfactory Temps. The Marginal Temps are characterized by the Marginal Temp Syn-

drome. It is expected that people who exhibit the Marginal Temp Syndrome will have lower job performance and exhibit more counterproductive behaviors. Furthermore, temporary workers will likely fall into two identifiable categories based on background variables and that these two categories predict job performance and counterproductive behaviors.

### Implications for Management

Many managers claim that a few employees are responsible for a disproportionate share of the problems in the workplace. Sometimes called "repeat offenders," "bad apples," or "trouble makers," these workers can interfere with the operation and performance of a department or a work group. The Marginal Temp Syndrome suggests that this may also occur among temporary employees: the Marginal Temps. Their status as Marginal Temps could be predicted from the responses to questions that typically appear on employment application forms. In this way, temporary agencies and host employers can avoid bringing potentially problematic employees into their workplace. Temporary agencies could use background data to screen their employees more carefully, and host employers could request temporary agency employers to report their analyses of their biographical data and other selection validation studies.

Temporary help agencies often face a dilemma in recruiting temporary workers. To successfully place temporary workers, they must first identify workers who are willing to accept temporary work assignments. This often means that the workers that apply for jobs at temporary agencies may have been previously laid off from prior work, or have poor work histories that have caused them to be willing to work for temporary agencies. Unfortunately, this may mean that many of the applicants coming to the temporary agencies could be poor workers if placed on assignments at host employer worksites. Thus, it is critically important for temporary agencies to conduct selection validation studies that will identify those factors that enable them to distinguish satisfactory workers from the marginal workers.

Notably, those workers who are the most willing to accept relatively undesirable temporary assignments involving shift-work, nights, weekends might also be those who are the most likely to be afflicted by the Temporary Worker Syndrome. They could be those who exhibit poorer work performance and more counterproductive behaviors. This leads to an important implication for temporary agencies. They should not be satisfied to recruit workers who are willing to accept temporary assignments. Rather, they should both recruit and screen applicants so that they can differentiate the marginal temps from the satisfactory temps. Likewise, host employers who purchase the services of temporary agencies, should

investigate the extent to which temporary agencies not only recruit those willing to work as temps, but also screen applicants on important job-related criteria.

### Directions for the Future

The Marginal Temp Syndrome provides insight into the important issue of the co-occurrence of different types of counterproductive behaviors (Sackett & DeVore, 2001). It is likely that there will be significant correlations between the recorded incidents of several types of counterproductive behaviors. Because there are many types of counterproductive behaviors and they are correlated with each other, their impact upon the workplace may be greater than what is implied by research that focuses on only one dimension, such as absenteeism or lateness.

Prior research suggests that when workers have the work hours that they want (full time vs. part time) they exhibit lower turnover and more extra-role performance, doing things beyond the basic requirements of the job (Holtom, Lee, & Tidd, 2002). However, temporary help agencies find themselves in a dilemma. They need applicants who are willing to work on a short-term basis, part-time, or off-shifts in order to make successful placements. Yet, the Marginal Temp Syndrome suggests that using employee willingness to work these hours as a selection criterion could result in assigning the least productive workers to host employers. Thus, temporary agencies should use other criteria when making referrals to host employers. Using selection tests or structured interviews measuring ability, conscientiousness, or other job-related predictors may help temporary agencies identify the best job candidates (Salgado et al., 2001).

There is also a need for more studies that examine the criterion-related validity of alternative selection methods for counterproductive behavior (e.g., Salgado et al., 2001). Biographical data, consisting of applicants' life histories, have not been widely used to predict counterproductive behaviors. Applicants' biographical data predicted job performance in several meta-analytic studies (e.g., Bleisener, 1996; Hunter & Hunter, 1984). It is likely to be predictive of job performance when it reflects long-term patterns of individual interaction with life events (Mumford et al., 1990). However, a few studies have used biographical data to predict counterproductive behaviors (e.g., Barge & Hough, 1986; McDaniel, 1989). Yet, no published study has reported the validity of biographical data predictors of counterproductive behaviors for temporary workers. Nevertheless, biographical data is a logical way to operationalize predictions and test hypotheses arising from the Ecology model.

### Limitations

This chapter focuses on temporary workers. However, many of the same propositions could also be applicable to workers in regular jobs. Future work is needed to show how propositions derived from an Ecology framework could be developed for applicability to workers in other jobs. Specifically, it would be useful to determine if the same type analysis of work history factors could be used to predict differences between marginal and satisfactory workers in regular jobs.

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## THE LIABILITIES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL WITH RESPECT TO CAREER DEVELOPMENT, THIRD-PARTY RELATIONSHIPS, CREATIVITY GENERATION, CHANGE, ORGANIZATIONAL AND SOCIETAL FRAGMENTATION, AND COLLECTIVE WRONGDOINGS

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Social capital has many benefits, and the concept has been applied to individual, group, organizational, community and world levels (Portes, 1998; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Individuals cultivate relationships with various parties in order to get advancement in their careers. Organizations seek to enhance productivity and innovation with teamwork. Organizations also engage in strategic alliances and joint ventures for reasons such as cost minimization, market expansion, and joint development of new products/services. Furthermore, claims have been made that social capital can help to advance economic development at the world level. However, social capital has liabilities as well. Therefore, this paper dwells on the downside of social capital in order to shed light on how management can be improved.

An outline of the paper is presented as follows. It begins with a synopsis of social capital. Emphasis is placed on Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) discussion of the three major facets of social capital: structural, relational

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