

Saimaa University of Applied Sciences  
Faculty of Business Administration, Lappeenranta  
Degree Programme in International Business

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# **The Influence of Corporate Image on the Attractiveness of Temporary Agency Work**

Thesis 2016

## **Abstract**

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The influence of corporate image on the attractiveness of temporary agency work, 44 pages, 2 appendices

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The purpose of this study was to find out what influences the attractiveness of temporary agency work in Lappeenranta, concerning the VMP Group; one of the leading personnel service agencies in Finland. The target groups of the survey study were current VMP employees and prospective job applicants. The study was carried out by using an online questionnaire.

The hypothesis for the research question, "What influences the attractiveness of temporary agency work", was that temporary work agencies tend to have a negative image and reputation in the eyes of prospective employees and perhaps even current ones. This hypothetically should be an influencing factor concerning the attractiveness of temporary agency work.

The results of the study show that corporate image does indeed affect the attractiveness of temporary agency work. The general opinion the employees had on working for a temporary work agency was positive unlike the prospective employees. According to the study there are several subjects that can have a positive effect on the corporate image and thus increase the attractiveness of the company to its prospective job applicants. Future research should focus on the factors of how to actually implement the changes required to increase the company's corporate image. The study should also be replicated in a later time to see whether the case company has been able to ameliorate their company image by using the findings of this study.

Keywords: corporate image, identity, reputation, temporary agency work, employer image, employee-employer relationship

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# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Background**

The topic of the thesis was chosen because temporary work is an increasing form of employment but it is generally not considered to be the most attractive option of employment. Reasons for this include false prejudices or for example possible irregularity in working hours. Unstable economy brings growth for companies who provide temporary workers, as they offer flexibility for employers. Therefore, there is a constant need for skillful and professional employees who are willing to work through an intermediary employer. At the same time the amount of these personnel services agencies is rising. Thus, a study on the attractiveness of temporary agency work can be useful for the case company and other companies working in the industry. Visibility of the company and its employer image were chosen as relevant factors in finding suitable workforce.

This thesis was commissioned by the local office of VMP Group; one of the leading personnel service agencies in Finland. However, the topic was suggested by the student who conducted this thesis. The author has done a practical training period in a human resources department within this industry, so personal experience is also a motivating factor for the research. The aim is to provide useful information of the company's employer image and help VMP increase the awareness of temporary agency work among people who are looking for work.

## **1.2 Objectives**

The aim of the research was to find out what people enjoy about temporary agency work and, on the other hand, what is not so appealing about it. The objective was to discover new ideas to improve the existing recruitment process. Finding skilled and loyal workforce is important for any company but especially for quickly changing personnel companies who must provide the best possible employees to their own clients. These challenges particularly give a purpose for the research of this thesis.

### **1.3 Delimitation**

The research was limited only to how employees and prospective job applicants perceive the employment agency in question, as well as temporary agency work in general. Thus, it will not focus on work within the client companies. The selection of employee interviewees was done from the VMP's employee database.

The target group of potential future employees was narrowed down to higher education students in Lappeenranta, due to the convenience of sending a questionnaire through the university.

### **1.4 VMP Group**

VMP is a Finnish personnel service company with a responsible attitude that specialises in producing personnel services in the European area. Varamiespalvelu (VMP since 2010) was founded in 1988 when entrepreneurs Mauno and Riitta Savolainen opened their first office in Turku. The business world was facing a shortage of labor and there was a clear demand for something that could unite businesses and jobseekers. (VMP Group 2015, 1.)

VMP has developed into one of the most well-known companies in its industry. They have built real partnerships and offer tailored staffing services to employers and employees. In practice, arranging staff through VMP Group means that the employees are at the service of the client, while at the same time their wages are paid by VMP Group. This way it is not necessary for the client company to use time on complicated recruiting procedures. Each year VMP interviews tens of thousands of prospective employees. They have gained much knowledge in their field and are quick to find the strengths and ambitions of their interviewees. (VMP Group 2015, 2.)

VMP takes care of the entire recruiting process from the beginning up to the end, so the client does not need to spend time with enquiries, applications or interviews. If an employee is absent due to, for example, sickness, VMP is responsible for the costs associated with it. There are many options for companies wishing to use a temporary worker through VMP. They may reserve employees according to their needs or have VMP hire out an employee for a fixed

period to work under VMP Group so the client company can test if the employee is suitable before a job relationship begins so it is also possible to find a permanent job through VMP Group. (VMP Group 2015, 2.)

VMP Group uses the general terms of agreement for leased labor set by Palvelualojen Toimialaliitto ry (Union for business in the service sector) in the staffing services industry (PTVuokra 2007) in the signing of its agreements with their customers (VMP Group 2015, 3).

## **1.5 Research questions and method**

The main research question is: What influences the attractiveness of temporary agency work? In order to find the answer, the following sub-questions were set:

- Does corporate image influence the attractiveness of temporary agency work?
- How can the attractiveness of temporary agency work be influenced?
- What is the state of perceived attractiveness of temporary agency work?

The main research question will be answered through the thorough explanation of the sub research questions. By answering the sub research questions a more in depth explanation can be created for answering the main research question.

Empirical research is the process used to collect data in order to receive new information to solve a research problem. It considers the essential issues such as what, why, when, from where and how data is collected as well as how the data is analyzed. (Business Dictionary 2016.)

There are two ways to conduct a research; quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research is a logical approach that measures what people think and analyzes it from a statistical point of view. Quantitative research mostly uses questionnaires and surveys with set answers to choose from, though there may be a few open questions as well to ensure depth and reasoning to the responses. (British Library 2015.)

Qualitative research on the other hand is more focused on how people feel, what they think and why they make certain choices. Qualitative research mostly consists of discussions on certain concepts or ideas with open questioning/ interviews. Attendees are encouraged to explain their answers, which can reveal underlying motivations and opinions. (British Library 2015.)

Since the objective of this thesis is to find out the beliefs and opinions current VMP employees and prospective job applicants have about temporary agency work, a quantitative research in the form of a questionnaire was used. It provided variety given that the number of respondents was larger than it would have been with interviews. Although interviews could perhaps create a deeper meaning to the answers, the addition of open questions to a questionnaire should meet the needs of this research. It was decided with the case company that their marketing department would provide the contact information of the employees.

## **2 Corporate image**

Many researchers have gone to a great extent to understand the concept of corporate image. Some believe it to be a substantial entity that triggers one's perception, while others consider it to be the entire experience that molds the perception as well as the impact it has on people's actions and reactions (Ditcher 1985). So, it is not hard to imagine that image and personality often go hand in hand. Aaron J. Spector (1961) believes people tend to "humanize" companies and use personality characteristics, usually used to describe people, to express how they see a company. This corresponds with the term brand personality, which refers to the human characteristics and personality traits associated with a brand and the company behind it. J.L Aaker talks about brand personality in her article Dimensions of brand personality. (Aaker. J.L, 1997.) People tend to connect better with companies that they can relate to personally and were they have experienced positive aspects reflecting their own personality. This implies that there is also an emotional element to corporate image that stakeholders, such as employees and customers, use to make choices. Image is therefore a

very important concept for organizations and needs to be further explored, as in the case of this thesis for its relationship to recruiting.

## **2.1 Factors affecting corporate image**

Corporate image has two main elements: the functional and the emotional. The functional component is related to easily measured concrete characteristics, while the emotional component is connected with feelings and attitudes towards a firm that come from individual experiences. Corporate image is, therefore, the result of a process by which the public compares and contrasts the various attributes of companies. The interaction of these factors results in distinguishing one company from all others. (Weiwei 2007.)

All of the factors that go into forming an image about something are part of the experience. Let's use a customer as an example; they see the name of the company or hear it in a conversation or commercial or perhaps through the media. This starts the creation of an image; what does it sound like, mean, incorporate. They then see a visual presentation of the company like certain colors or literature. This encourages the image in one direction. A company's logo is like the heart of the company; it is what reflects the company's identity and can be changed slightly to keep up with trends. Customers rarely hear a company's mission statement, codes of ethics, annual report or company slogan directly; they hear it through advertising or public relations. Then there is interacting with the company through its employees. They project the image of the organization, which is crucial in service organizations where personnel interactions can be the key to customer satisfaction. (Change Conversations 2013.)

## **2.2 Word of Mouth (WOM)**

Feedback is also extremely essential in the management of corporate identity. Without truthful information of the observations and opinions of customers as well as other stakeholders, a company cannot develop their image. A continuous stream of feedback through employees who are in constant contact with various stakeholders would be ideal because it could allow alterations to be made to a company's way of doing things without having to hire someone to conduct a formal study. It is reactive and fast. (Balmer, Gray 2003.)



It is more common to see word of mouth (WOM) linked to reputation than it is to see it linked to image. WOM can be seen as both the cause and the effect of corporate reputation. Good WOM creates a positive image in the minds of stakeholders, which creates a good reputation. However, a successfully planned and communicated identity leads to a good image in the minds of stakeholders, which then leads to a reputation that generates WOM. (Williams, Buttle, Biggemann 2012.)

It is important to generate positive WOM internally in order to reduce negative WOM and employee agitation externally. Social media is an extremely quick way to spread information and can often turn negative and potentially damaging to a company's reputation. (Pownall 2011.) This is why it is important to keep track of what is being said on the social media and to try and influence it in a positive way.

### **2.3 Employer image**

Since this study is for a personnel services company, the concept of employer image can be applied here. One of the sub-questions is "how can the attractiveness of temporary agency work be influenced", so considering employer image and its attractiveness might help to answer this question.

Like company image, employer image is how people perceive the company, but in this case the people are current and potential employees. It is about how they see the company and what they think it would be like to work there.

Therefore, employer image is about a company effectively communicating its values, personality and culture in order to create a desired identity to its customers. It affects every aspect the company shares with employees; recruitment, socialization, training and development of career paths and even the process of leaving the company.

Both the employer and company image need to be closely linked in order to present the company consistently and effectively. If how the company present itself to the outside world and how its employees view the company are not in sync, the identity will have a confusing message and will fail to engage both

external and internal stakeholders. The best employer images are realistic but always positive and create a picture people can relate to. To successfully shape an employer image one needs to invest in existing employees. (Real Staffing 2015.)

## **2.4 From identity to image to reputation**

There are many terms for how a company is perceived by stakeholders. Different researchers use different terms; corporate image, corporate identity, reputation, brand etc. One thing however, that is commonly agreed on, is that it has a very important role in the road to success. (Pitkänen 2001.) In order to be successful and effective, every organization needs a clear image and this is something that can be influenced from the inside.

Different, experiences, beliefs, attitudes, information, feelings and observations, all go into the process of forming an image. Everyone can have an individual image because it is experienced by the people. So, how can this be influenced?

Philip Kotler explains in his book Marketing Management, how important it is to first distinguish the difference between image and identity. Image is how stakeholders perceive a company or its products/ services. A company creates an identity in the hopes of molding their public's impression of them. Of course other factors influence the image as well and so it may not always coincide with the identity. (Management Study Guide 2015.)

Corporate Identity is the influencing factor. It is how a company aims to be recognized or identified and should match the expectations of both customers and employees about what the organization stands for, where it is heading and what its strengths, weaknesses and principles are. It should have a clear personality. (Balmer 1997.) Birkigt and Stadler's (1986) theory of symbolism, communication and behavior explains how to obtain a beneficial corporate identity that develops from the company itself (Otubanjo 2013).

In order to keep customers from seeking out competitors it is equally important to stay consistent and clear with any messages expressed. This is where be-

havior comes in. Actions and accomplishments as well as planned or unplanned non-verbal behavior communicate personality. (Lippincott 2015.)

Symbolism, such as logos, corporate colors and other visual aids help express the nature of personalities to stakeholders in order to create awareness. It could also be said that symbolism is a form of communication, as it has a part in communicating corporate strategy.

There is however, much more to communication because it links everything together. Corporate communications involves interacting with all stakeholders in an official, as well as informal way through an assortment of media. The idea is to express a chosen identity to the audiences and hope that they, in turn, encourage the company's image and reputation in the same direction. In short, communication is the link between a company's identity, image and reputation. (Balmer, Gray 2003.)

For an organization to successfully manage an identity in the minds of its different stakeholders it must manage the communications. Logos are important but without the right marketing channels, they can become useless or even harmful. (Otubanjo 2013.)

Image should not be mistaken as reputation either, as reputation can evolve from the images a company has. Image is the immediate mental picture people get from a company, while reputation is evolved over time. The word 'reputation' comes from the latin words "re" and "putare", so it literally means calculating over and over again. Reputation also derives from the company's identity and can be very much influenced by word of mouth, media and of course personal experience. The future of a company is also taken into consideration when people form their opinions, so the reputation of a company is not set in stone, but rather changes with the actions of the company, whether they are deliberate or not. (Carroll 2013.)

However, reputation is fragile. While it may take time to gain a respected reputation, it can easily be destroyed. A single occasion can sweep aside years of stored generosity (European Institute for Brand Management 2009).

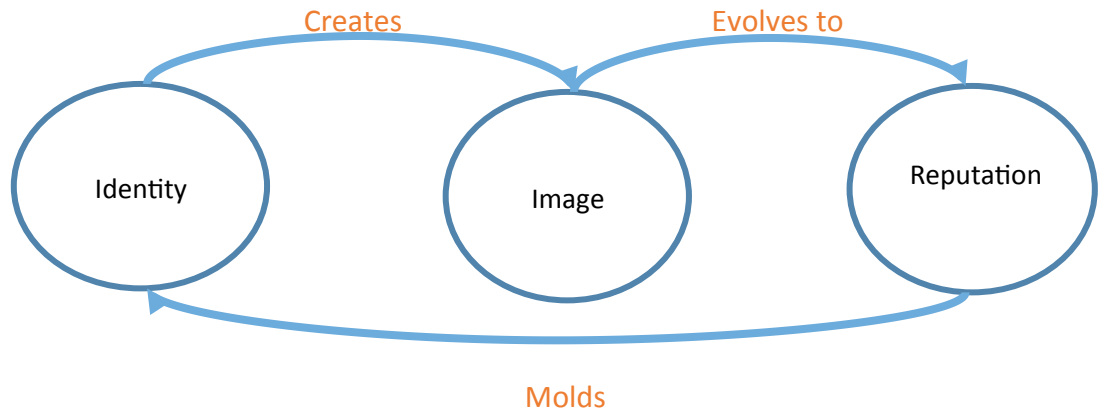


Figure 1. Corporate Identity and the evolution of corporate image

It could be said that a corporation's identity shapes the image a company wants to create for itself and even unintentionally builds the image the stakeholder has. Figure 1 shows the relationship between identity, image and reputation. Corporate identity is the determining factor behind what the company is seen as and how the company wants itself to be seen. Corporate image becomes part of the corporate identity as it is shaped by the choices made by the company. Everything the company does is basically built inside corporate identity, which becomes the corporate image, which takes into account all the factors stakeholders see of the companies' processes, products and services. In due time corporate image evolves into corporate reputation from the image seen by the employees, customers and other shareholders groups the company might have. Corporate reputation could also be stated as the educated corporate image associated with a company. Corporate reputation is the same as corporate image but with a wider time perspective. The process of building company identity into company reputation starts from the beginning each time a company, either purposefully or not, begins to try to maintain its corporate identity and image by the expectations of its shareholders, or the reputation of the company. Therefore, affecting any of the aforementioned three stages of building corporate identity will eventually affect the other two stages.

## **2.5 The effect of corporate image on recruiting**

If a job advertisement is from a company like KONE or Rovio it immediately attracts attention regardless the job description. They are well known companies and people have already formed their opinions and created an image, which has then become the reputation. These companies receive job applications throughout the year, even when they are not hiring. This is a good sign that a company has a healthy employer image. Companies with bad reputations face greater recruiting costs due to the difficulty of attracting new talent. This is particularly true when recruiting more experienced workers.

Attracting and retaining experienced workers and keeping them motivated is extremely important when it comes to a company's success. When the human resource management of a company retains a competent, motivated and responsible group of employees, it will positively mold the corporate reputation. As mentioned before, employees interact with other stakeholders such as potential employees, customers and investors and project a positive image of the organization. (Cable, Turban 2003.)

## **3 Temporary agency work**

How does a company find and match the right people to the right jobs? Recruitment is a time-consuming process, as can be seen in figure 2. It consists of many different processes, which include but are not limited to, developing accurate job descriptions of the open positions, compiling a profile of the ideal employee for that job description, making and posting the add, developing a screening system for candidates, reviewing resumes, selecting and assessing candidates, interviewing candidates, background checking, finally making an offer to the selected candidate and negotiating the terms of the contract. In addition employers must follow-up with the hired people to make sure they are suitable for the position. (Entrepreneur 2016.)



Figure 2. Recruitment Process (Entrepreneur 2016.)

The importance of hiring good employees is, however, still essential. Employees are the most important tools in making a business run; they are what enable a business to be something more than just an idea. A business cannot run unless someone is making decisions and acting on those decisions and so on.

When customers interact with bad employees, it often creates a snowball effect, where they tell other potential customers of their negative experience. If this continues to happen the number of customers will visibly decline and drive down sales. Although this seems like common sense, it is actually quite typical. The reasons for this is not certain but one could be limited time and resources to effectively deal with recruitment. (Business Training Media 2016.)

It is quite common today to see companies thriving to achieve cost effectiveness and flexibility in all aspects of their resources, including staff. Through a temporary work agency a company acquires an employee hassle-free without having to commit to them for more than the required time. (Viitala 2007.)

### 3.1 How do temporary work agencies function

A company that is in need of employees signs a contract with a temporary agency company. That company is called a user company. A temporary agency company recruits employees to lease to the user company according to the tasks and needs of the user company. (Vuokratyöopas 2013.)

A temporary agency contract is a kind of triangular agreement where companies can outsource their recruitment process instead of hiring employees themselves. The employment agency plays the role of the employer who leases temporary agency workers to user companies in exchange for compensation. (Salli, 2012, 105.) As a result, a temporary agency worker signs an employment contract with the employment agency who is responsible for salary and insurance and other employer obligations. The user company is of course responsible for the arrangements and training of the employee and it is up to them to supervise and manage the actual work. It is possible for a temporary agency employee to work at different user companies at the same time. The employer is always the temporary work agency with which the contract has been signed. (Sädevirta 2002.)

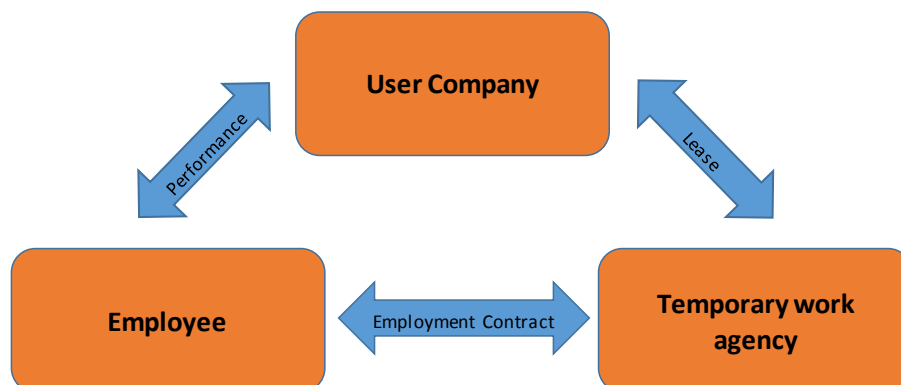


Figure 3. Triangular employment relationship (Elomaa 2011) translated from Finnish to English by Maria Enberg

Figure 3 shows the different parties involved in temporary agency work. The client company orders workforce and informs the employment agency of the needed resources, which leads to a customer contract between the two compa-

nies. Then the agency will find suitable employees and make an employment contract between the employee and the agency as an employer. Finally, the temporary agency worker will perform the work at the client company's premises.

The employment agency is responsible for all general obligations of an employer, such as paying the salaries, while the user or a client company must supervise and manage the actual work. Working through an employment agency is usually flexible – the temporary agency worker can be employed by several agencies at the same time and also the organizations in which the work is carried out may vary a lot.

### **3.2 Temporary agency work today**

The use of temporary work agencies had a significant rise after the financial depression of 1990 when fixed-term employment made way to part-time work. It can be said that the depression had a big effect on the way companies hired employees. Many were unsure and did not want to make any permanent risky decisions, thus hiring only part-time employees. (Viitala, Vettensaari, Mäkipelkola 2006) Today we see many processes being outsourced for the same reason. It also increases the need for temporary agency workers.

Statistics Finland has collected information about temporary agency workers in their Labour Force Survey only since 2006, which suggests that it is a fairly recent form of employment in Finland. However, the industry has been growing quite quickly and companies are using more and more outsourced workforce. According to HPL, The Private Employment Agencies' Association, the number of companies who provide employment services has increased by 60 percent. They have also become more versatile, many offering training opportunities and head-hunting along with other human resource solutions. (Henkilöstöpalveluyritysten Liitto 2015.)

### **3.3 Reasons for using temporary work agencies**

Probably the most common reason for using temporary agency workers is the fact that companies, thus, avoid the responsibilities of being an employer. Some



companies might not have resources for efficient recruiting. Having all of the responsibilities of an employer can cause fear of hiring, which leads to using temporary agency workers. For small companies, hiring new employees can be difficult. For example when a private entrepreneur wants to hire their first employee they might not have human resource (HR) management knowledge, or the resources to acquire it. Doing all of the HR work can take a lot of time, so small businesses may consider temporary agency work as a viable option to get workforce. (Elomaa 2011.) Outsourcing those tasks is more effortless even though there are additional costs.

In cases where a company has had to lay off employees due to financial difficulties or other similarly problematic reasons, they are legally required to offer any open positions to the laid off employees before they can look elsewhere. This is where temporary agency workers has an advantage, because the above statement does not concern them and thus user companies are able to hire temporary agency workers over the employees that have been laid off. (Moilanen 2008.)

It should be noted that temporary agency work differs from subcontracting, in which the subcontractor also bears the obligations of an employer in addition to supervision of work. Using temporary agency workers is effortless for the user company, as they do not have to worry about the employer obligations. (Moilanen 2008.)

Sometimes companies use temporary agency workers most when they need a substitute worker and during the high seasons. For example seasonal changes or sick leaves can cause the user company to need more employees, and temporary agency workers are a quick and easy way to have skilled personnel in the workforce. They are also quite easy to get rid of when the demand drops. Forecasting demand is very hard, so it is easy to have temporary agency workers come and work for a week or two, which can relieve the user company from additional HR costs and help them meet their customers' orders. (Viitala et al 2006.) Some user companies may also have project-based tasks, which means that they only need employees for certain projects during certain times. In those kinds of situations, using temporary agency workers is ideal.

In their research for the Ministry of Labor, Viitala et al (2006) found that there were three main reasons people used temporary agency work. They were flexibility demands for production, managing costs and recruitment and minimizing the HR work relating to it.

VMP found five reasons using temporary agency work, simplifying recruiting processes for user companies, which are quite similar.

1. Extensive complicated recruiting not necessary.
2. User companies can reserve employees according to their needs and for any amount of time without having to commit too much.
3. In hectic situations it is easy to acquire temporary help in the form of agency workers - even on short notice.
4. User companies can focus their time on other pressing matters and leave the time consuming payroll management to the temporary work agency. VMP for example invoices only per actual working hour, including all obligatory employment costs (wages, holiday pay, employer's social security contributions).
5. If an employee is absent due to sickness the temporary work agency is responsible for the costs. (VMP Group 2015, 1.)

### **3.4 Equality**

An important topic found in previous literature is equality. Temporary agency workers have the same rights as ordinary permanent workers when it comes to the services and shared arrangements like access to the company gym, meals in the staff canteen and discounts on the services of partner companies. However, because the user company is not responsible for paying the salary, they also do not have the duty to contribute financially to these arrangements. For instance, temporary agency workers may have to pay more for lunches. (Salli 2012.) Temporary agency workers also accumulate annual holiday and pension for the work they do just like they would in any other employment relationship. It

is also required that the temporary agency and the user company have to, to a certain extent, inform the employees of any open positions they may have. (Työsuojelu 2016.)

Temporary agency work is subject to the same employment legislation as all other employment relationships. There are even specific parts added to ensure the occupational safety of the agency worker in their everyday work. It is required that the user company must inform the temporary agency of the occupational skill requirements of the job and the special features of the work involved so that they can together find skilled and qualified employees for the position.

In a temporary employment relationship the work-safety of employees is considered the responsibility of the user company. This however, does not mean the agency is not required to ensure the employees are equipped with enough knowledge and training to carry out the tasks they are hired to do. (Sädevirta 2002.)

Temporary work agencies often demand compensation from the user company if they would want to recruit an employee directly to their company from their temporary agency work. This poses a problem for both the user company as well as the employee as the user company might not see the employment as profitable because of these compensations. As the user company might not be willing to pay for the compensations this also poses a problem for the employees as it becomes increasingly difficult to get hired to one of the user companies that have ordered their services from the temporary work agency. Therefore the compensations should be adjusted so the amount of the compensations would make it possible for the employees to get hired to a permanent task instead of multiple fixed-term employments even when the user company might need a permanent solution. This of course is a double-sided problem, as the temporary work agencies make their profits by providing employees and would rather not let their employees get hired straight to the user companies and without the compensations. The user companies could easily use the temporary work agencies only for finding employees to hire for their own usage. (Elomaa 2011.)

As in most jobs in Finland working through temporary agencies also contains a probation time included in the employment contract. A probation time can be half of the total amount of time of the employment, up to a maximum of four months. The purpose of a probation period in the employment contract is to give both sides a possibility to terminate the contract without a term of notice. When working for a temporary agency the management and supervision of the employees is done by the temporary work agency, the termination of a contract is also always done by the temp agency, even when on probation period. Of course the user company also observes how the employees function in the tasks at hand, and can often times terminate the contracts by contacting the temp agency, which holds the responsibility over the work contract. (Elomaa 2011.)

## **4 Empirical findings and analysis**

The purpose of this part of the thesis is to analyze the answers of the survey and create a common understanding on the influence corporate image has on the attractiveness of temporary agency work. The questionnaire is analyzed through the use of statistical analyses on the means and answers of the questions. The empirical side of the study brings together the theoretical side of the study in order to answer the research question. As the sample size provided by the questionnaire was not significantly large, only basic statistical methods were used. However the sample size should be sufficient to give a good basis on the subject at hand and bring forth new information on the subject.

### **4.1 Questionnaire**

The questionnaire used in this survey study is made out of 16 questions to current employees and 16 questions to prospective employees. The questionnaire uses a set of background questions, which inform what kinds of respondents answered the questionnaire. The total number of respondents for the surveys was 52, out of which 50 percent represented the prospective employees and the other 50 percent represented the employees of VMP. The split between the two groups was made in order to show the possible impact in the attractiveness of temporary agency work created by working in a temporary agency work

company. There are three open questions. For a full list of questions, see appendices 1 and 2.

## 4.2 Demographics

The gender distribution of both the employees and the prospects were quite equal as they were close to the 50% mark. However the age distribution shows that out of the respondents of the survey the age of the already working employees was significantly higher than of those still considering working for a temporary work agency. This is explained by the fact that most of the respondents on the prospective employee's side were students, who tend to be younger. This could affect the perception of the results when the results of the different segments are compared. The percentages of the age and gender distribution of both groups of respondents can be seen in figures 4 and 5.

Other demographics such as field of study and employment situation can be used by the case company VMP as a means to find target groups of prospective job applicants.

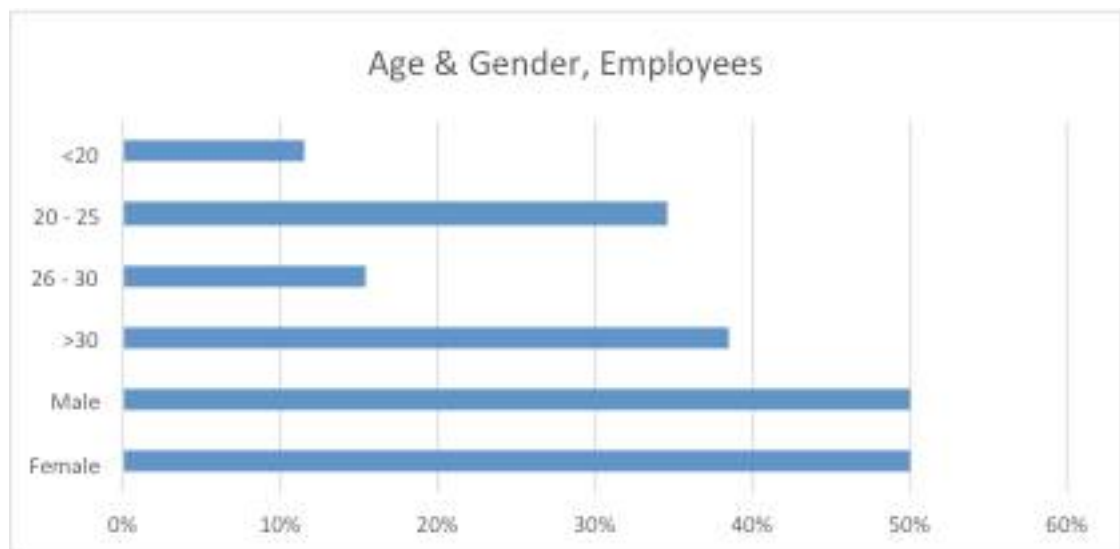


Figure 4. The age and gender distribution of employees, questions 1 & 2

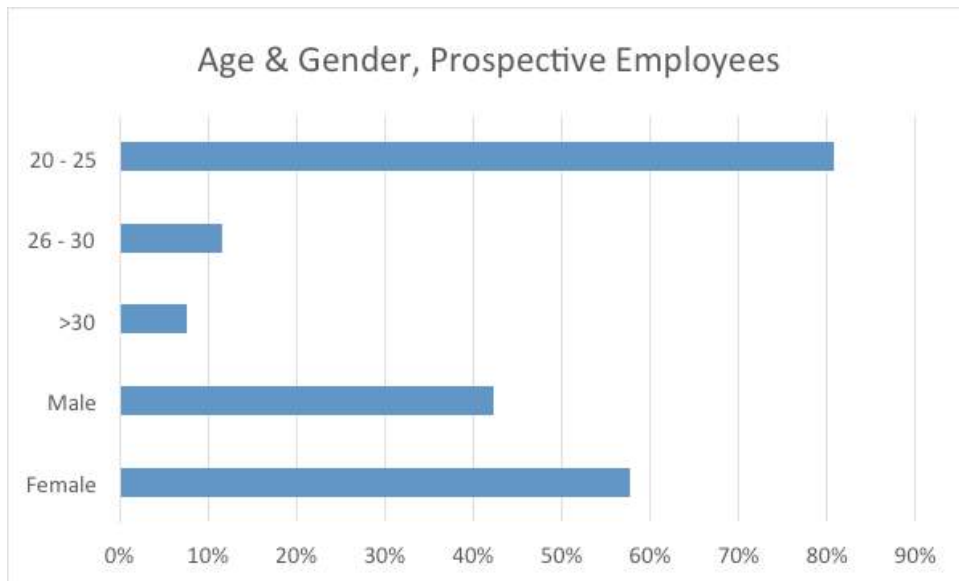


Figure 5 .The age and gender distribution of prospective employees, questions 1 & 2

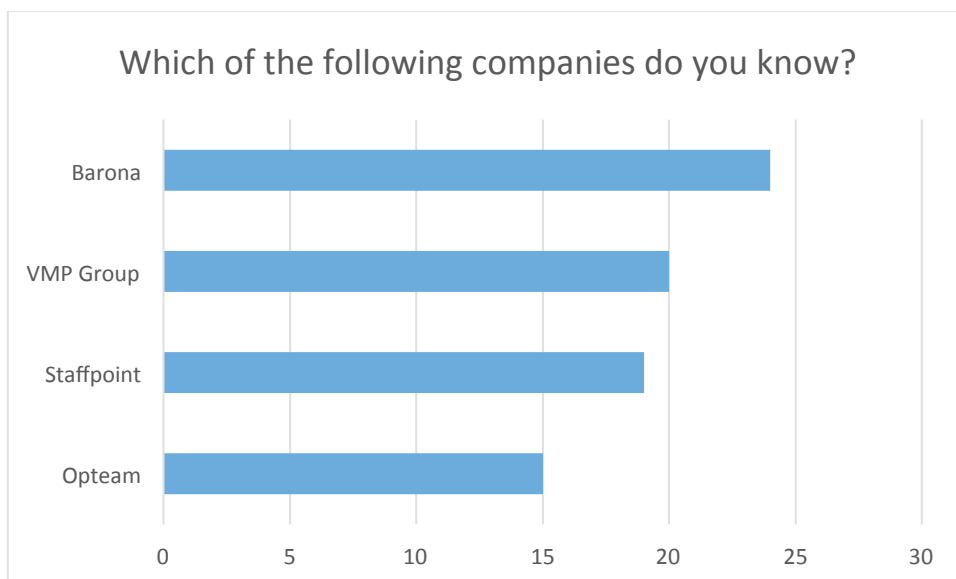


Figure 6. Knowledge of companies, question 12

As can be seen in figure 6, 100% of prospective employees knew at least 1 of the companies mentioned. Barona and VMP were the most well-known agencies.

### 4.3 Thoughts on temporary agency work

Looking at figure 7 it is clear that people have the impression that temporary agencies only offer part-time work and short-term work. Only 23% of people thought it could be possible to find a full-time job through a temporary agency. Another 23% did not think it could be possible to find any job though temporary agency work, though some chose part-time and short-term as well. These responses show the lack of confidence people seem to have towards these types of agencies.

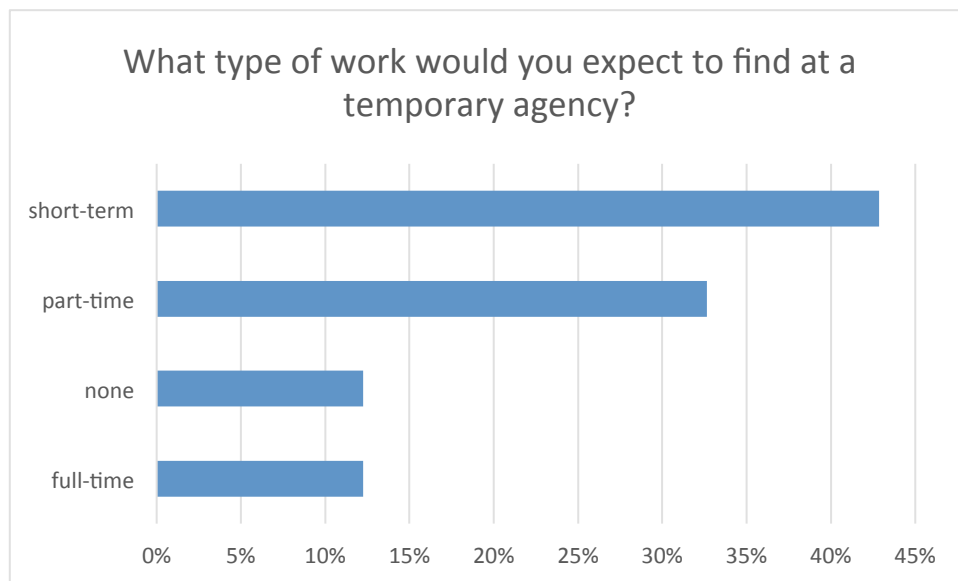


Figure 7. What type of work prospective employees expect to find through a temporary work agency, question 10

The answers to the question “would you consider working for a temporary agency in the future” can be seen in figure 8. It did not get many enthusiastic responses with 54% of the respondents saying they could consider it and only 21% of them had already worked as temporary agency workers. Not many of the people who explained their reasons, would want to work as temporary workers as a first choice.

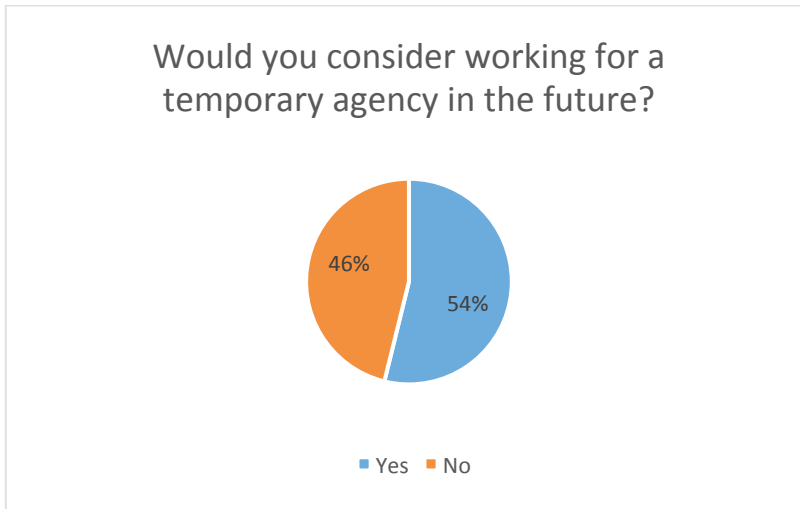


Figure 8. Would prospective employees consider being a temporary agency worker in the future? Question 9

The remaining 46% respondents said they could not consider working for a temporary agency.

#### 4.4 Image

The respondents were asked what are the three reasons that affect their applying to a company. Figures 9 and 10 show the answer behaviors of the questions for both the employee and possible employee's sides.

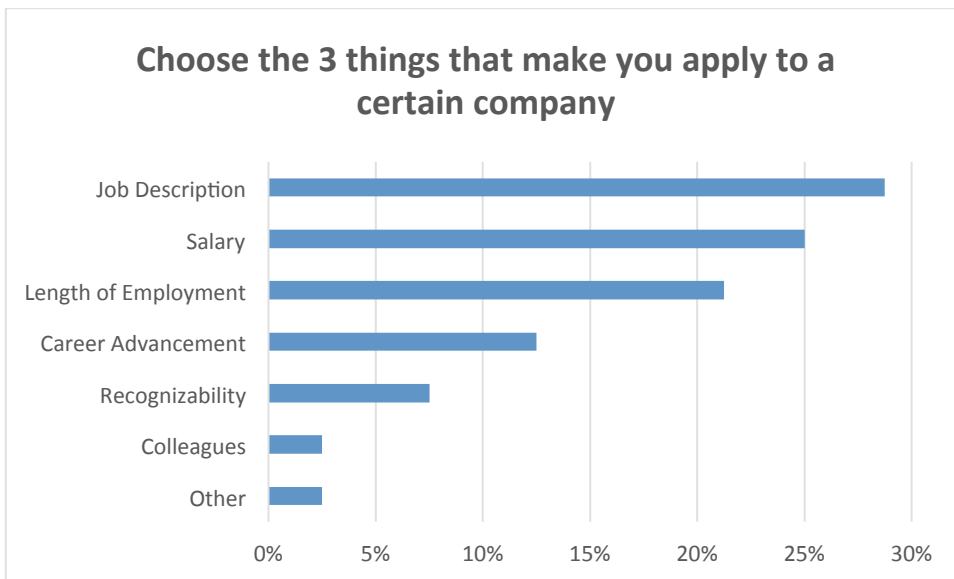


Figure 9. Reasons behind applying to a certain company, prospective employees view, question 13



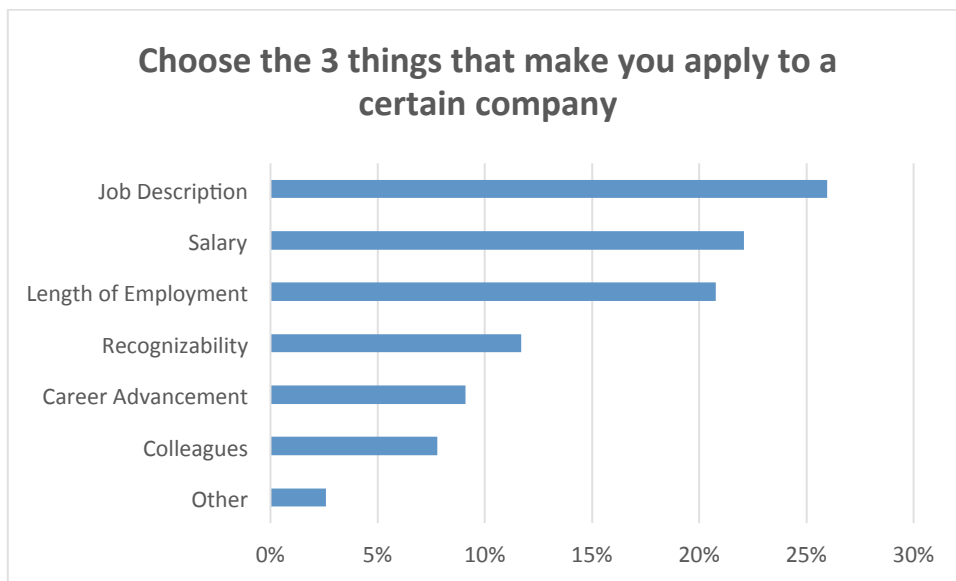


Figure 10. Reasons behind applying to a certain company, current employee view, question 11

The opinion seemed to be very unanimous because the same top 3 remained no matter what demographics were used (age, amount of work experience, employment situation etc.).

Looking at that fact that people seem to find the type and length of employment to be of most importance makes it easy to see why so many find it an unappealing way to find employment, given that many answered the open question “what images temporary agency work forms in them” with statements resulting in the exact opposite. In the previous question respondents were asked what type of employment they thought a temporary work agency offered. The most common responses were short-term and part-time work, so the fact that the length of employment is of great importance, makes it clearer to see, why temporary agency work has a bad reputation.

Respondents were also asked to evaluate the importance of 5 terms from an employer image point of view as can be seen in tables 1 and 2. The terms were: trustworthiness, equality, encouragement, flexibility and ethicality.

Table 1. The Importance of employer image, prospective employees, question 14

<b>Question/Value</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Trustworthy</b>	0	0	0	3	23	4,88
<b>Equal</b>	0	0	4	11	11	4,12
<b>Encouraging</b>	0	1	5	10	10	4,08
<b>Flexible</b>	0	1	1	19	5	4,27
<b>Ethical</b>	1	2	4	13	6	3,81

(1 = not important at all, 2 = not so important, 3 = no opinion on the matter, 4 = quite important, 5 = of great importance)

The mean of the prospective employees for the question concerning the important values of a company was 4,23. However the mean for the trustworthiness of a company was exceedingly higher than that of the questions as a whole as it was 4,88. Also on the other end of the spectrum the ethics of a company was scored with only a mean of 3,81. The answers of this questions shows that the possible employees of the study have a high regard for the trustworthiness of a company but do not regard the ethics to be of great value for them when deciding on their next employer.

Table 2. The Importance of employer image, current employees, question 12

<b>Question/Value</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Trustworthy</b>	0	0	1	2	23	4,85
<b>Equal</b>	0	0	0	9	17	4,65
<b>Encouraging</b>	0	0	6	10	10	4,15
<b>Flexible</b>	0	0	3	11	12	4,35
<b>Ethical</b>	0	2	5	8	11	3,92

(1 = not important at all, 2 = not so important, 3 = no opinion on the matter, 4 = quite important, 5 = of great importance)

Much like with the prospective employees the current employees also show an increase in the mean of the trustworthiness of a company and a decrease in the mean for the ethicality of the company as the most important values. However, differing from the mean of the prospective employees the equality of the com-

pany also played an elevated role in the answer behavior of the survey respondents. The mean for equality was 4,65, which is not as high as the one for the trustworthiness. It can be said that both sides of the survey study show that the prospective employees appreciate the possibility of working in a company that believes in its employees and treats them fairly.

People desire to be able to rely on their employer and be treated as equals yet they do not seem to care much of the idea of an ethical employer. What is a bit contradicting here, is the fact that later, when openly asked what images temporary agency work produces in them, they responded in a very contrasting way. Ethics and right and wrong, were very much involved in the reactions received and temporary agency work was even compared to slave labor, in the sense that it is a cheap way of transferring responsibility from the employer to the agency. The prospective job applicants also thought that temporary agencies offer work where *“the same work is done but with a worse salary than when directly employed to the company.”* Even though ethics was seen by the respondents as the thing that matters the least, it has on many occasions been seen as an extremely important factor when choosing a company to work for in previous literature. It has even been said in a research by Forbes that over half of the students would accept a lower salary if it meant working for a more socially responsible company. (Albinger, H. & Freeman S. 2000.) Many also point towards a lack of employment conditions and benefits as well as poor salary and a constant sense of uncertainty. One respondent even mentioned a similarity to capitalism.

#### **4.5 Open questions**

The results of the open questions of the survey were analyzed using discretion. The open questions surveyed the meaningfulness and image of temporary work, and the case company in general in the minds of the respondents.

Prospective job applicants were asked to describe the images temporary agency work produced in their minds. Eight percent of the respondents did not give a valid answer. Keeping in mind that most of the prospective job applicants do not have experience from temporary agency work, 76 % of the analyzed responses

were mostly negative. Many were under the impression that it is not possible to find full-time, permanent work through a temporary work agency. Another common opinion was that the salary and benefits of temporary agency workers is much more lacking compared to those who are directly hired by the user company. One example of the answers provided by the prospective applicants which fit in this group would be *“Cheap labor, responsibility is moved from the company to the temp agency, kind of like slave labor.”*

Only 16 % of the respondents had positive images of temporary agency work but many of them were also unsure and skeptical about the actual use of their services. *“The term temporary agency work awakens negative feelings, but the work itself is not so bad.”* The ones who thought positively believed that there is nothing wrong with temporary work as long as it fits the needs of the employee as one respondent stated *“You can find jobs from many different industries that suit yourself. The employment contracts change a lot and might suit different needs. Often times well suited for young students.”*

When the 26 current employees were asked why they applied for temporary work through VMP the most common answer, with a percentage on 38, was “because there was nothing else available”. Many of them had hoped to find a full-time position but could not, so decided to work through VMP until they found a more permanent job.

However, 23 % of the respondents explained how their situation at the time of their applying had been such that the job advertisements of VMP suited them better than a full-time job would have. Another common reason was money; many respondents found themselves in need of some extra finances and used VMP to acquire it.

The answers of question 14 “how has your opinion on temporary work agencies changed after working for one?” for current employees were divided into 6 distinct groups based on the answer behavior of the respondents. The groups are distinguished through the mindset the respondents had on the subject matter and went from the most positive group “positive before and after” to the most negative “negative before and after”. Out of the total 26 answers three answers

were not descriptive enough to be fitted into any distinct group and were left out of the analysis.

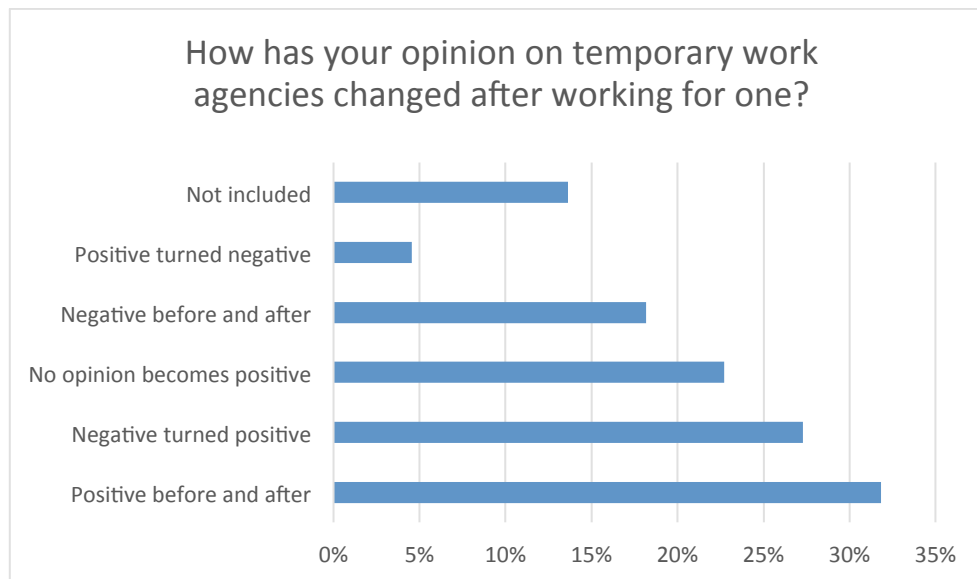


Figure 11. Current employee opinions on temporary agency work

By analyzing the output of question 14 from figure 9 it can be seen that the overall opinion current employees of VMP have on the attractiveness of temporary agency work is positive. Out of the total 23 responses 18 were positive generating an incredible positive feedback of 78%. An interesting fact presented by the question is that most of the respondents with a positive mindset on temporary agency work did not find it appealing in the past but have changed their opinion after working for a temporary agency themselves. For example, one respondent exclaimed how they had thought they would not receive any appealing job offers. However, after working at VMP, they were pleasantly surprised at the quality of work offered. One of the respondents stated that *“No opinion before working, but would now recommend temporary agency work to others.”* Even though Finnish workers seem to generally find temporary agency work unattractive, it would seem that actually working for one increases the meaningfulness and general attractiveness. This suggests that getting people interested in VMP as an employer through the different marketing channels should be VMP’s main target at the moment.

Lastly, current employees were asked to give positive and constructive feedback to VMP as an employer. The employees had some advice for temporary work agencies in order to increase their attractiveness. Such statements included having different working hours so that studying could be done while working, as well as taking time for meetings with temporary agency workers to discuss the challenges and how to cope with them. Other statements included the integration of workers to the environment they will be working in, as to not create a gap between the actual workers of the customer company and the temporary workers. Employees have also stated that temporary work agencies should provide job applicants and workers with more information on their company and being more open about their business model and overall performance. The main problem would seem to be for many workers that they do not feel as a part of the company they were working for and rather would often be treated as outside workers in the customer company.

However, there were respondents in the survey who did not specify anything to be wrong with working for a temporary agency. These respondents spoke highly about the flexibility and effectiveness of the operations of VMP. They also praised that temp agencies have contacts and possibilities that are normally out of the reach of typical employees. It was also said that the easiness of working with VMP was great and that they were good at contacting possible job applicants and providing them with additional job possibilities. The employees also found the variability of possible jobs to be exceptional and one employee went as far as saying that it would be hard to find an employer as good as VMP. All in all the image created by the responses of current VMP employees seems to speak for working through a temporary work agency.

85% of the respondents were happy with their work-situation at VMP, explaining how things worked as they should and that sometimes there was so much work offered that there was not enough time to accept it all. Only 15% were not happy and they mostly complained about the lack of work offered/ available, which suggests that more user companies could be of use in certain fields.

#### **4.6 Validity and reliability**

There were not many respondents given the short schedule at the beginning of the research but the fact that the prospective job applicants were acquired through the university and the current employees were randomly chosen from VMP's database makes the answers more reliable. The delimitation questions also gave more credibility as to who the respondents were and their points of view.

There were two questionnaires made so as to take into consideration the differences between the two segments and to allow the different points of view to really shine through. It was considered that had the questionnaires been identical they would have been confusing for the two answering segments and the open questions would have been less to the point.

The literature used includes books and articles as well as reliable websites. The concept of corporate image has many viewpoints making it a broad subject to report. In this study the author has kept the theory part close to the topic at hand in order to maintain a structured whole.

### **5 Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to find out, what factors influence the attractiveness of temporary agency work and whether or not the image temporary work agencies have, is a contributing factor. Corporate image was said to be a mental picture, an association combined from information from several different sources like experiences, beliefs, attitudes, information, feelings and observations. Companies try to steer the direction of how stakeholders will perceive their company by creating an identity that they project through advertisement, employees and many other communication channels. An image is also very personal and it is never exactly the same for two different people. Reputation is what accumulates from the corporate identity and image over time. It is also not set in stone, but rather changes with the developments of the company.

Temporary work agencies retain workers to send out on short- or long-term assignments so that companies in need of workers can enter a contract with the temporary work agency to fill jobs with appropriately skilled workers.

At the beginning of the research the decision was made that the respondents were divided into two different segments. These groups were current employees and prospective job applicants. This made it easier to understand how these different groups see temporary agency work. According to the empirical research done by the author, most of the negative opinions came from prospective job applicants who had never experienced work through a temporary work agency. Current employees openly explained how they felt before and after working at VMP and most had either had a positive outlook throughout or changed their mind from negative to positive after working with VMP.

Many prospective job applicant -respondents of the questionnaire seemed to have the impression that temporary work agencies only offer part-time work and short-term work. Though more than half said they could consider working for a temporary work agency, they often added that it would not be their first choice. Both segments found the type and length of employment to be of most importance when looking for open positions to apply for.

When the respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of 5 terms, trustworthiness, equality, encouraging, flexibility and ethicality, the answers of both segments showed that respondents have a high regard for the trustworthiness of a company but do not regard the ethics to be of great value for them when deciding on their next employer. However, ethics and morality was a largely discussed topic in the open question section on the questionnaire, which suggests that the respondents have a different perception of ethics than the author.

The results of the open questions of the survey were analyzed using discretion. The open questions surveyed the meaningfulness and image of temporary work, and the case company in general in the minds of the respondents. 76% of prospective job applicants had a negative image of temporary work agencies in general and quite a few current employees also felt negatively towards tempo-



rary agency work before starting at VMP. When the current employees were asked why they had applied for jobs through VMP, 38% remarked how there was nothing else “better” available, referring to full-time jobs. However, after having experienced work through VMP, 78% of the current employees had a positive image of temporary agency work and many went to explain that the type and amount of work was better than they expected and a few had even acquired a full-time job directly from a user company after having first worked there through VMP.

The current employees had some advice for temporary work agencies in order to increase their attractiveness. Such statements included having more flexibility in working hours so that studying could be done while working, as well as taking time for meetings with temporary agency workers to discuss the challenges and how to cope with them. However, there were respondents in the survey who did not specify anything to be wrong with working for a temporary agency. In fact, 85% of respondents were happy with their work-situation at VMP.

Because there was such a clear divide between the opinions of current and prospective employee, it might be a good idea to hold some events, where current employees could openly discuss their experiences of temporary agency work with potential employees. This way they could also answer questions and ease any concerns about temporary work agencies as employers.

Some other factors that have an effect on the attractiveness of temporary agency work are e.g. the personal situation of the job seeker and what type of work they are searching for, salary and length of employment. There may be a negative image or perhaps even reputation surrounding temporary agency work that has derived from exaggeration, but they do have a truth behind them. Temporary agency workers do tend to have a smaller salary than direct employees because of the fact that the user company must pay a wage to the temporary work agency for recruiting and leasing the employers. It is also commonly thought that temporary work tends to consist of a variety of job durations, so the offered work may not suit everyone.

As can be seen, the image of VMP to its current employees is satisfactory and the current employees seem to have a positive mindset of VMP. However, the corporate identity and image does not transmit to the prospective employees, which are the lifeline for companies like VMP. They should therefore try to increase their marketing and strive to bring forth their values in order to create additional and increasing value for both its customer companies and employees. VMP as a company is in a special position as its marketing campaigns can be targeted to its suppliers, the prospective employees, as well as its customers, the purchasing organisations.

Another point that came up was the fact that it may be more difficult to communicate with an employer if it is a temporary work agency because it is not the same company you work at. This also makes it hard for temporary work agencies to build a strong and positive employer image because the employees mostly contact them with contractual and obligatory business while the user company supplies the environment, colleagues and other work-conditions that entail of a large part of producing the employer image and subsequently the overall corporate image.

In conclusion, although the temporary work agencies are sometimes seen as a last resort; a place for unskilled workers to find low-wage, short-term jobs. Corporate image does indeed affect the attractiveness of temporary agency work. It was found that once people have experienced temporary work, they often see and value the positive sides it offers.

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## **Appendix 1.**

Prospective job applicant questionnaire translated from Finnish to English.

1. Age?
2. Gender?
3. Field of Study?
4. Study degree/ progression?
5. Are you currently employed?
6. Amount of work experience?
7. Where do you primarily look for open positions?
8. Have you ever worked for a temporary work agency?
9. Would you consider working for a temporary agency in the future?
10. What type of work would you expect to find through a temporary work agency?
11. Do you think there are open temporary work positions in your own field?
12. Which of the following temporary agencies do you know?
13. Choose the 3 things that make you apply to a certain company.
14. Evaluate the importance of the values from an employer image point of view.
15. What images does temporary agency work awaken?

## **Appendix 2.**

Current employee questionnaire translated from Finnish to English.

1. Age?
2. Gender?
3. Occupation?
4. Level of education?
5. What is your current employment situation?
6. Duration of time at VMP.
7. Why did you apply for VMP?
8. Have you worked for other temporary work agencies?



9. In which of VMP's sectors have you worked in?
10. Are you satisfied with your situation at VMP?
11. Choose the 3 things that make you apply to a certain company.
12. Evaluate the importance of the values from an employer image point of view.
13. How has your opinion on temporary work agencies changed after working for one?
14. Openly express any positive aspects and improvements of temporary agency work. How could VMP better their attractiveness.