

Skills development while in temporary work?

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Section 2.4, 'Skills Development'

Keywords

Skills development,
temporary agency work,
work-based learning,
continuing training,
informal learning

SUMMARY

The question of skill development in temporary work has so far been neglected in research and practice. The expansion and speciality of this way of earning a living – particularly as a result of the frequently changing demands on different workplaces and the strategy of lifelong learning favoured by educational policy in order to obtain and improve qualifications – make it necessary to demonstrate plans for skills development for this target group. The findings make it clear that opportunities to develop skills are essentially to be found in temporary work itself, i.e. by means of learning while working. In this form of the learning process, knowledge and aptitudes which have already been acquired are combined with capabilities which develop in the course of working. As a result, this process of working and learning produces informally acquired skills which could be documented and provide grounds for targeted support of skills in temporary work.

Background

Throughout Europe, temporary ways of earning a living, such as temporary work or fixed-term contracts of employment, are no longer a peripheral phenomenon, since more than one eighth of the European workforce is in this type of employment (cf. EIRO, 2002; cited by Le Mouillour, 2002). Nevertheless, in all the countries of the European Union these employees benefit from companies' skills development measures to a considerably lower extent than the permanent workforce. There are only a few countries in which attempts have been made to develop the skills of temporary workers, e.g. the Netherlands, where, for instance, times when temporary workers are not working are used for the targeted development of skills to a much greater extent. In Germany, however, this subject has so far not played a large role.

As a result of the increased pressure of competition, firms demand ever more flexible, adaptive employees who can be placed in a versatile, short-term fashion. Therefore, the proportion of employees with standard employment contracts has been decreasing since 1970 (cf. Schäfer, 2001; Sauter, 1998). Standard employment is understood here to refer to non-fixed-term, full-time employment in which a contract of employment is entered into which assigns certain rights of control to the employer and which is based on the provisions of employment law and social welfare law. Since the 1970s, comprehensive measures have existed with respect to innovations under employment law and social welfare law, such as more flexible working time arrangements, new arrangements for pension start dates, reduced protection against unfair dismissal, facilitation of fixed-term contracts of employment, a turning-away from comprehensive collective wage agreements, etc. (cf. Schulze Buschoff and Rückert-John, 2000). In 1988, three quarters of the workforce had non-fixed-term, full-time contracts of employment; nowadays, only two thirds of all employees have 'regular' working arrangements (cf. the 2003 Micro-census). As many as 35-40 % have 'non-regular' contracts of employment, which, as well as teleworking, part-time work, 'sideline' employment and new forms of self-employment and freelance work, also include temporary work and fixed-term employment.

The official description of temporary work is 'professional supply of temporary workers'. This exists when employers supply employees to third parties to perform jobs for them for the purpose of economic gain. The temporary workers are in a triangular relationship, since they work for a limited period of time in a firm to which they are 'loaned' but receive their salary from, and have the usual social security contri-

butions paid by, the temporary employment agency, with which they usually conclude a non-fixed-term contract of employment. Depending on the interests involved, temporary work may take on different functions: from the point of view of the undertaking, temporary workers are available workers; from the point of view of the temporary worker this is a way of avoiding unemployment; from the point of view of the job market, temporary employment may be regarded as an intermediate stage in integrating unemployed people into non-fixed-term contracts of employment, and from the point of view of qualifications, temporary work provides an opportunity to develop occupational skills (cf. Wittwer and Münchhausen, 2001).

Since 1993, the number of employees placed in temporary work has more than trebled, from 121 000 to just under 400 000 in 2004 (Table 1).

Table 1. **Employees placed in work in Germany – average figures**

	Total	Men	Women	Proportion (%)
1994	134 443	109 550	24 893	0.49
1995	165 819	134 646	31 173	0.58
1996	175 798	142 692	33 106	0.64
1997	200 541	161 626	38 915	0.78
1998	245 780	196 258	49 522	0.93
1999	275 838	217 490	58 347	1.04
2000	328 011	252 185	75 826	1.22
2001	341 053	263 985	77 067	1.28
2002	319 299	244 331	74 960	1.22
2003	330 219	253 221	76 997	1.29
2004	385 256	292 394	92 863	1.51

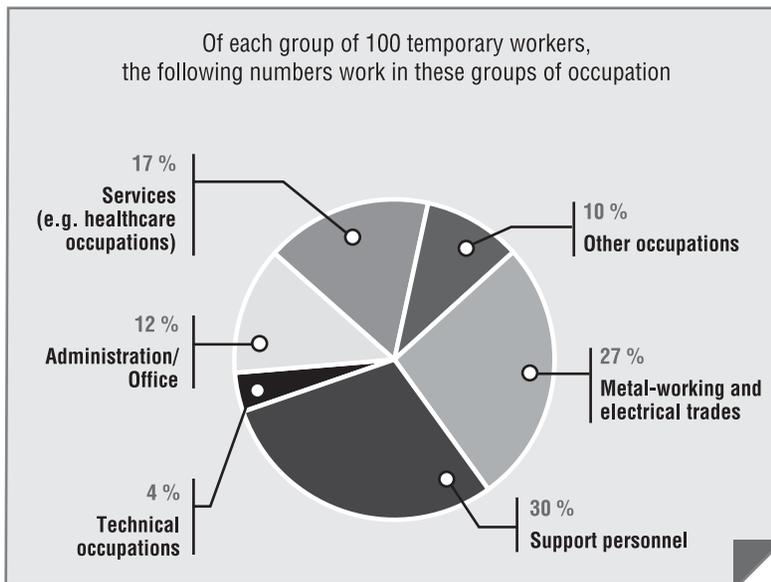
Source: 2005 BA [Bundesagentur für Arbeit, Federal Labour Agency] statistics, *IAB Kurzbericht* [Summary Report] 14/05.

The reason for these strong growth rates, in addition to economic developments, is the introduction of the *Personal-Service-Agenturen* (PSAs, Personnel Service Agencies). The federal government set up these PSAs with the objective of re-integrating the unemployed into the labour market. The model for these agencies is based on the system of lending and borrowing that is used in temporary work.

The number of employees involved in PSAs is relatively low in comparison with the overall number of temporary workers. In 2004, the proportion of temporary workers (excluding PSA employees) was still only 1.4 % (cf. Jahn, 2005).

In 2004, the predominant proportion of temporary workers was placed in the metal-working and electrical trades (27 %), or in work as support personnel (30 %), in services (e.g. healthcare occupations) (17 %), in administrative and office work (12 %), in other occupations (10 %) and in technical occupations (4 %).

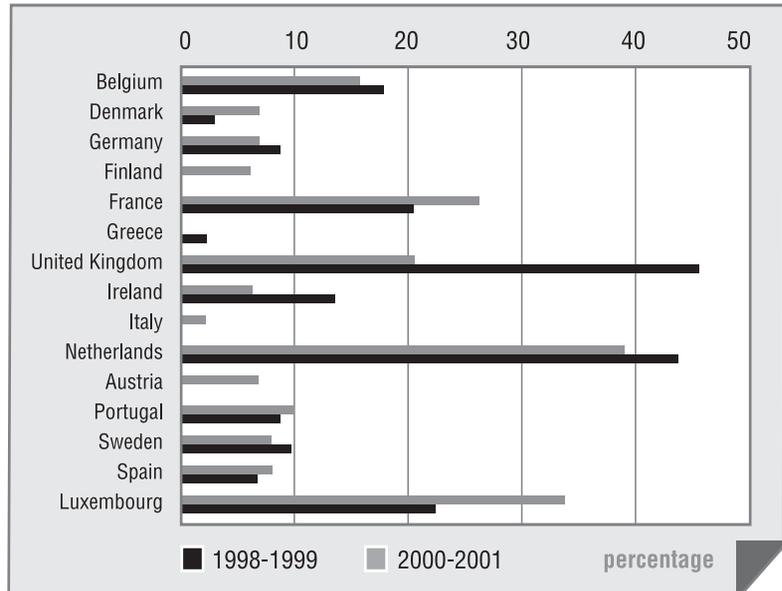
Figure 1. **Temporary work, 2004**



Source: IGZ 08/05.

However, temporary work in this country is still some way behind the international comparative figures. In the USA, according to Sennett (1998), temporary work is still the fastest growing sector of the employment market. In Europe, the frontrunners in temporary work are the Netherlands (4.5 % of 7.2 million working people) and the United Kingdom (4.7 % of 28.1 million) (cf. *IAB-Kurzbericht [Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung (Institute for Employment Research) Summary Report] No 21/2002*).

Figure 2. **Proportions of temporary workers in the European Union**



Source: CIETT (2000, 2002), national reports from *IAB Kurzbericht*.

The necessity of developing skills in temporary work

As a result of the processes of change in the economy, technology and society, it is becoming ever more important for workers to develop their skills in order to retain their individual employability. Occupational competence is the sum of the capabilities, skills and knowledge which make people capable of acting and reacting in both familiar and new situations (cf. Kauffeld, 2002). If there are no opportunities to use one's own skills, there is a danger that they will be lost (cf. Münchhausen, 2007).

The objective of developing skills is to foster employees' occupational competence to act (professional competence, social competence, methodological competence and personal competence) to enable them to deal with the complex changes of environment and resulting changing requirements. The measures to develop competence may be subdivided into formalised forms, such as seminars, job rotation and competence recording, and non-formalised forms, in which the emphasis is on learning while working, for example

concomitant coaching and reflection discussions, self-directed learning or quality circle within the group ⁽²⁾.

Competence development is of great importance to temporary workers in particular, since they have committed themselves to changing workplaces and thus to changing occupational activities and a changing professional/social environment. They are confronted with a large number of occupational changes, which are frequently accompanied by a feeling of insecurity (in the workplace) and a lower level of loyalty and commitment to the company.

Temporary workers frequently have to cope with an intensification of work and time pressure, but they are hardly ever provided with support measures by means of occupational competence development within the company. To date, vocational training research in Germany has scarcely touched on the question of competence development for this target group. However, since the type of temporary employment is becoming increasingly more popular, it is very important that remedial action be taken here, by identifying, analysing and assessing the possible ways of developing competence in these new forms of employment. Competence development is required, in the interests of the individual temporary employees, in the interests of companies and the entire national economy (cf. Schickler, 2002).

The research findings, which have to date been selective, confirm that temporary workers are only provided with a small degree of support in their competence development (cf. Bernien, 1998). In a 2001 study, the Cologne-based *Institut zur Erforschung sozialer Chancen* (Institute for the Research of Social Prospects, ISO) established that in the long term temporary workers are offered hardly any further training. As a rule, undertakings are only interested in short-term utilisation of labour. It is logical in terms of making the company more flexible not to include workers on fixed-term contracts in the company's competence development or further training programmes in order to avoid additional direct or indirect costs. In many cases, there are no incentives in companies to make it possible for temporary workers to participate in competence development and further training, since it has not been clearly established who in particular can acquire the returns and the benefit. Furthermore, it is unclear who funds this and what form of competence devel-

⁽²⁾ Recently, workplace learning in particular – for example by setting up special learning infrastructures, a combination of learning locations, integrating learning times at the workplace – has become increasingly significant (cf. Baethge and Baethge-Kinsky, 2002).

opment is appropriate for this target group (cf. Bolder et al., 2005).

In 1998, Baethge and Schiersmann established that the combination of the new, more flexible employment relationships and current concepts of competence development constitutes a pivotal field of research.

The subject of competence development for temporary workers has also been neglected in research work in European countries. This is confirmed by investigations by the Wissenschaftliches Zentrum für Berufs- und Hochschulforschung (Centre for Research into Higher Education and Work) at the University of Kassel, which has set up international monitoring of the link between, inter alia, these employment relationships and competence development on behalf of the development programme 'Learning Culture of Competence Development' (cf. Le Mouillour, 2002) ⁽⁹⁾.

The findings of the second European continuing training survey (CVTS II – Continuing Vocational Training Survey) provide a detailed overview of a very wide range of aspects of (formal and informal) continuing training in enterprises, but no information is provided about temporary forms of employment and of earning a living (cf. Grünewald; Moraal; Schönfeld, 2003).

Objectives of the research work

Against the background described above, a research project by the Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, BIBB) aimed to obtain findings regarding the organisation of competence development for temporary workers.

Its objective was to follow up the question of how the learning potential of changes can be used in a targeted manner to develop the skills of employees, since a survey carried out at the University of Bielefeld revealed that many temporary workers see the supposed weak point of temporary work, i.e. frequently changing job, as in fact an advantage, because new workplaces and changes opened up new options for them (cf. Wittwer and Münchhausen, 2001). The objective was to investigate the extent to which temporary work can be organised in such a way that employees can gain qualifications while working and can then use these new qualifications in a targeted manner (e.g. development of a support worker to become a skilled

⁽⁹⁾ However, in the meantime further training for temporary workers has been defined as a priority for the CIETT (cf. CIETT 2001) and the European Community within the scope of negotiations on the Temporary Workers Directive (cf. COM (2002) 149).

worker). It was therefore also an objective to find out how the skills acquired can be made transparent, since this is a mandatory precondition for recognition of them.

Overall, the findings obtained are intended to provide starting points for organising competence development for temporary workers. These can then serve as a basis for further quantitative empirical surveys. Moreover, transferable starting points will present themselves for other forms of employment which are encountering changes of activities and other changes, such as fixed-term employment, so-called new autonomy and work on projects.

Important starting points for organising competence development for temporary employees can be starting points at which the working process is understood as a learning process (learning at work).

The initial qualifications and educational backgrounds of temporary workers have a decisive impact on the processes and tools for competence development, because when supporting competence development enterprises make a clear distinction between the permanent workforce and the temporary workers placed there for a limited period of time.

The findings of the BIBB research project are described below.

Previous research findings

Case studies in the Netherlands and France

Within the scope of the BIBB research project, an investigation was carried out to determine how competence development for temporary workers in the Netherlands and France is organised and what experience had been with it. To this end, interviews based on guidelines were used in temporary employment agencies and the enterprises which employ these target groups and enable them to develop their competence and skills. The findings were evaluated in accordance with the qualitative content analysis used by Mayring (2003).

The consideration of the Netherlands is interesting in so far as temporary work is more widespread there in quantitative terms and has greater social recognition than in Germany. It seems to be 'more normal' to be in temporary work there. However, activities for competence development among employees have only existed for two years (cf. Münchhausen, 2007).

A significant feature of the Dutch temporary employment market is that more than 40 % of temporary employees are still at college

(cf. www.abu.nl). Therefore, this group of people is not necessarily interested in a qualification. Almost 75 % of temporary employees are younger than 35, i.e. it is their first or second job. The average duration of a contract with the temporary employment agencies is 155 days.

These facts are of significance for the question of competence development. Following a new wage agreement, in 2004 a start was made on setting up fund-linked personal further training budgets. The budget is set up for a maximum of three years, and each year 1 % of the total wages paid into the fund by the temporary employment agency are added to it (i.e. a total of 3 %). The longer someone works for a temporary employment agency, the higher the budget for further training.

There are two essential points here: firstly, it is a tool for the individual temporary workers to be able to take up further training or to have the money paid to them. Secondly, it provides stimulus for the enterprises to invest the money in their own temporary workers or in their continued training, since they have to pay it anyway.

However, this process does not begin until after an employment period of 182 days (phase model), i.e. more than the average duration of a contract. Previously, temporary workers had no right to further training, but there is a lack of measures to support and motivate temporary workers (key phrase: groups with low take-up of training), since the question of specific implementation is left to the parties involved.

With respect to the question of recognition and certification of the skills acquired while on work assignments, various activities also exist to an increasing extent in the Netherlands. Processes and tools for recording and assessing competence and learning while working are being developed (cf. www.cinop.nl). To date, however, there has been hardly any recognition of the various work assignments of the temporary workers in the companies in which they are placed.

The study of temporary work in France was produced in cooperation with Céreq (Centre d'études et de recherches sur les qualifications, Marseille). The data were essentially ascertained by theoretical research and empirical editing of literature available in France. Moreover, expert discussions were held with representatives of the temporary employment sector. The following findings were obtained in the course of this study.

In France, the number of temporary workers, predominantly employed in commerce and industry, increased from 1996 to 2000 from around 250 000 to more than 750 000, which corresponds to a proportion of 2.5 %.

In 2004, temporary employment relationships lasted for an average of 13 days (both the duration of 'loan' to companies using temporary workers and that of employment with temporary employment agencies).

Temporary workers are relatively young: more than half are under 30, and almost three quarters are men. In 1998, almost a third (31 %) of temporary employees had not completed vocational training.

Temporary workers are employed primarily in the building trade and in industry. The principle of equal treatment, in accordance with which each temporary worker is entitled to the same pay as a permanent employee, fundamentally applies. In addition, each temporary worker receives a so-called 'precariousness premium' amounting to 10 % remuneration in compensation for the precarious nature of the employment relationship.

Legally, all French companies with more than nine employees must spend a certain percentage of gross pay (since 2004 the figure has been 1.6 %) on funding further vocational training. In the temporary employment sector, the social parties have fixed a higher contribution of 2 %, i.e. in France, as in the Netherlands, an attempt is being made, by means of an appropriate statutory and/or collective wage agreement arrangement, to ensure that temporary workers receive further training.

According to the data gathered from the tax return and processed by Céreq, in 2002, 25 % of all temporary workers participated in further training measures, which had an average duration of 28 hours. In 2004, 59 % of participants in the transport/warehousing sector received further training.

In addition to these formal further training opportunities, attempts to develop competence informally are increasingly widespread. The 2002 'Social Modernisation Act' and the procedure which it introduced for recognising skills acquired while working meet with particular resonance in the field of temporary employment: regularly changing one's workplace, occupation and working environment boosts skills, which should be recognised in the form of certification. Thus, for example, the temporary employment agency Adecco has developed a 'competence passport' in conjunction with the Professional Association for Adult Training (AFPA), which makes it possible for temporary workers to acquire a recognised qualification through their professional experience.

Although this approach is promising, the fact that in France, as in the Netherlands, the recording and recognition of skills acquired informally while working, i.e. by means of occupational experience,

is still in its infancy cannot be ignored (cf. Möbus, 2007, p. 223 et seq.). However, it can be seen that these developments in particular hold future opportunities to develop competence in temporary work, not least also because the formal training system no longer provides adequately qualified workers, and a predicted lack of skilled workers needs to be countered by alternative ways of acquiring qualifications.

Survey of temporary employment agencies

In addition to the case studies described in Germany's two neighbouring countries, within the scope of the BIBB research project in Germany, temporary employment agencies were asked to determine the activities and further training options in temporary work. The temporary employment agencies concerned were exclusively agencies which supply employees on a professional basis. In preparation for the survey, first of all:

- a special address database for temporary employment agencies was drawn up by reconciliation and cleansing of various data sources, and was imported into the survey software,
- the survey tool was developed and
- transferred to the CATI survey software developed by the IES (see below), and
- the pretest was carried out.

A subtly differentiated quantitative analysis of work placements and activities in temporary work was considered necessary in order to carry out the survey in the undertakings. Previous studies are merely roughly subdivided into superordinate occupational groups, but for the issue of competence development a substantially more differentiated description is required. This was achieved by means of a research assignment to be allocated externally.

To this end, a telephone survey (CATI – Computer Aided Telephone Interview) was carried out by the Hanover-based IES (Institute of Development Planning and Structural Research at the University of Hanover) concerning the aforementioned sectors. In total, 365 telephone interviews with representatives of the temporary employment agencies were completed. Around 45 % of these agencies employ 1-49 workers, 48 % employ 50-249 workers, and only 7 % have more than 250 employees.

The representative survey of the temporary employment agencies provided comprehensive information about the structure of temporary employment and the organisation of further training. The findings of the survey are summarised and evaluated below.

The majority of enterprises working in the field of temporary employment are small and medium-sized enterprises with 10-99 employees whose principal field of business is usually supplying temporary workers. Other fields of business are related activities such as direct placement in work and advisory and/or organisational services for undertakings. Additionally, they operate in other, very diverse sectors, such as industry, call centres and IT services. Two thirds of temporary employment agencies are independent operations. They predominantly place workers in the local area.

The largest economic sector by far is the production industry, which has occupations which require completed vocational training or no completed vocational qualification. It can therefore be understood why the vast majority of workers in temporary employment are male and the most frequent vocational qualification is vocational training in a company or at college. Moreover, many of the workers have no vocational qualification. Most of those in temporary employment were previously unemployed, but temporary work does not seem unattractive for workers who were previously employees who had to pay social insurance contributions. The largest age group is 25-40 year olds. Most temporary workers have an open-ended contract of employment and have been employed by the company for a year or more. They predominantly work in the firms in which they are placed for periods of one to six months and from six months to two years. Their placements are usually appropriate to their level of qualification.

In line with the significance of the production industry, the most frequent occupations should be classified in the industrial/technical sector, followed by support activities not defined in greater detail, the commercial sector and personal and social services. Closer investigation of the occupations reveals that there are very specialised temporary employment agencies which place workers virtually exclusively in individual lines of business, and also agencies which place workers in a broad spectrum of occupations.

The activities most frequently mentioned by temporary employment agencies are carried out in the production industry and require completion of dual training or no vocational qualification. In the industrial/technical sector, employees predominantly carry out metal-working duties, e.g. welding, turning and milling, and undertake (electrical) installation work or painting and warehouse work. The most frequent activities in the commercial field are book-keeping, administrative and secretarial duties. The most frequent support and semi-skilled work (not described in greater detail) includes working in a warehouse and using machinery. The field of personal and social

services plays a comparatively small role in temporary employment, and accordingly the agencies only specified a few activities in this field. The most frequent duties in this field, along with telephoning, are kitchen work and caring/nursing work.

Although in a third of temporary employment agencies the duties and tasks of employees change as they acquire seniority within the company, frequently leading to them taking on more demanding, independent and extensive duties, this does not appear to be the result of targeted development of skills in the temporary employment agencies. This conjecture is also supported by the fact that further vocational training of their employees only plays a relatively large role in a quarter of all companies. Overall, the findings on further training are quite contradictory.

While the companies predominantly register skills acquired while working and more rarely those acquired in the private sphere, they do not promote these skills, or do not use them in a targeted manner. Thus, within the scope of human resources development, which is implemented by only around half of the companies, the tools of documentation and recognition of skills gained are used less frequently. External activities for the placements of their employees play a role in few companies.

Further training predominantly takes place during times when employees are not placed with companies. The further training courses are clearly focused on professional content. Involvement in further training measures in companies with which employees are placed takes place very infrequently or never.

The survey of activities was an essential core component of the survey and was carried out with the objective of deriving starting points for supporting skill development in temporary employment. However, respondents displayed little readiness to answer this question. Moreover, they were imprecise and provided little detail. The reasons for this cannot be investigated definitively at this juncture. However, it is obvious that they are to be found on the one hand in the survey tool itself, which was drafted very extensively and had a large number of open questions, and thus strained the patience of or time available to respondents. On the other hand, there is also some evidence that they are to be found in the selection of respondents (units of analysis) themselves. Time pressure, lack of insight into the meaning of the question, lack of willingness to consider the matter or even pure ignorance are presumably frequent impediments to answering the question about activities. There are many points to support the supposition that respondents are actually not aware of the individual activities of their employees, or are only aware of

these individual activities to a limited extent, and that these activities are not yet an important topic for them. This confirms that targeted development of skills in temporary work is something of an exception.

Despite the somewhat unsatisfactory findings on the activities of temporary workers, this survey made it possible to gain a comprehensive overview of the structure of temporary work. The findings confirm that the development of skills is still only perceived and considered by companies to a very small extent.

Survey of temporary employees

Another survey, this time of temporary workers, sought to obtain a subjective view of two threads of questioning, further training and activities. A total of 433 temporary workers were surveyed by means of a combined offline/online questionnaire by a group of researchers from the department of economic and social psychology at the Friedrich Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg.

With respect to the activities carried out, clear differences were ascertained in the learning potential and personal advancement provided by the placement activities. The criteria for this to apply were the variety of the work, the exercise of influence or freedom of action, and the complexity of requirements and of workload.

Within the scope of a nationwide survey, for the first time the status quo regarding formal and informal options for competence development among temporary workers in Germany was investigated. The sample provides a good reflection of the universal set of temporary workers and can be regarded as being representative, to a very wide extent, of temporary workers in Germany.

Only a small proportion of temporary workers received formal further training provision. This was usually limited to legally prescribed safety instructions for temporary workers in the industrial sector and the metal-working and electrical sector, the provision of information material or funding additional qualifications (e.g. fork-lift truck certificate). The companies in which workers were placed tended to offer more further training than the temporary employment agencies. This further training was usually directly connected to the specific requirements of the worker's current placement, with a focus on sales training sessions, product training sessions and specific production or manufacturing processes.

A more in-depth examination of work activities on placements revealed that temporary workers are relatively unlikely to have varied work and freedom of action in the workplace. Astonishingly, however, quantitative pressure in placements was not very pronounced.

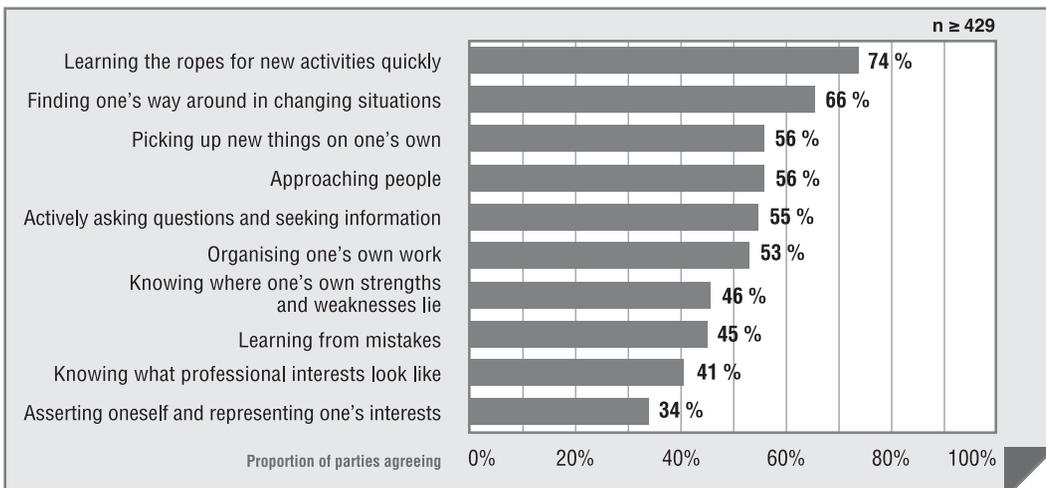
Although the work does not tend to be organised in a way which promotes learning and there is a low level of provision of formal continuing training, temporary workers consider the amount of knowledge gained within the scope of their activities to be relatively high. Even general assessments of temporary work reflect the fact that the majority of temporary workers were able to acquire or extend their capabilities through temporary work, and a large proportion of them would recommend temporary work.

From the plethora of findings, four aspects stand out in particular which emphasise the importance of the acquisition of skills for temporary workers.

Acquisition of knowledge and learning sources

As well as acquiring specialist skills, learning while working may also foster the development of interdisciplinary skills. The temporary workers surveyed place greater emphasis on the latter. Thus, more than 70 % of respondents believe that an important skill learned from temporary work is the ability to learn the ropes for new activities quickly, and 66 % were able to further develop their capability to find their way around in changing situations. More than half of temporary employees believe they have been able to develop further in aspects of proactive social interaction, e.g. ‘approaching people’, ‘actively asking questions and seeking information’. The following figure presents the various capabilities and the proportion in which strong further development was experienced in each case.

Figure 3. **Capabilities which it was possible to develop further by means of temporary work**



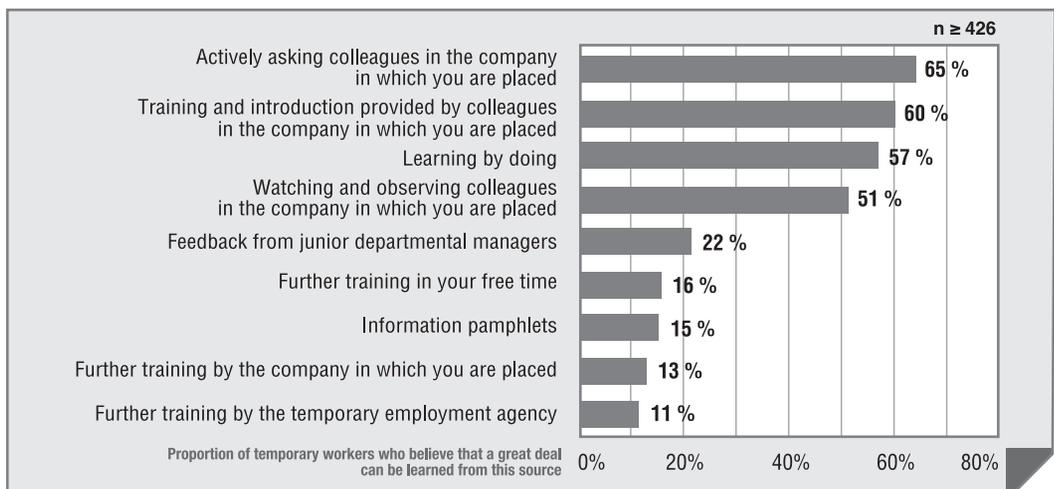
Learning sources

In temporary work, social and methodical skills appear to play an important role in picking up and developing capabilities and skills. This is also reflected if temporary employees are asked about the relevant learning sources (see the following figure). In any case, 65 % of temporary workers state that actively asking colleagues in the company where they are placed is a central source for learning.

No subdivisions with respect to content could be distinguished, i.e. the different areas of capabilities were either closely related, and temporary workers tended to experience a high level of further training in all areas, or they experienced only a small amount of development in all areas.

Temporary employees attest that informal sources of learning are more beneficial than formal further training provided by the company in which they are placed or by the temporary employment agency. However, it must be borne in mind that only a few temporary employees were at all able to participate in formal further training. As a result, the low estimation of the learning gain from formal further training is likely to be due to the fact that there was no provision, not to the fact that the further training measures were assessed as having a low efficiency level. In particular, contact with permanent colleagues in the company in which they are placed seems to be accorded a central role in learning while in temporary employment, as is 'learning by doing'.

Figure 4. **Estimation of the learning gain from different learning sources and further training sources**



General evaluation of temporary work by temporary workers

If temporary workers are asked to provide a general evaluation of temporary work, 51 % are able to recommend it as a type of employment. 42 % recommend it to a limited extent, and 7 % say that from their point of view they cannot recommend this type of employment. More than half of respondents said they were able to make their capabilities more specialised or to expand them, although for 23 % there was no resultant development of capabilities, and 8 % of temporary workers assume they have lost skills during the course of temporary work (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5, **Development of capabilities and skills during the course of temporary work**

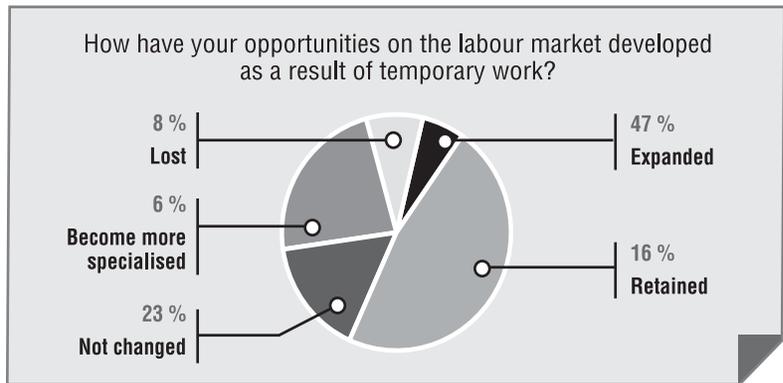
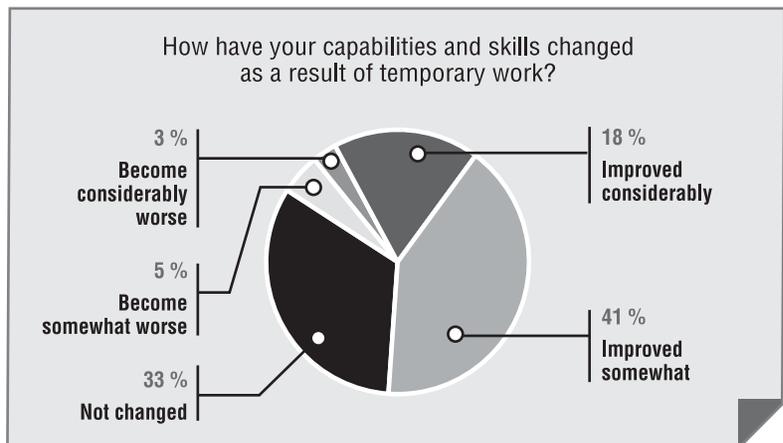


Figure 6. **Development of opportunities on the labour market**



Employability is closely connected to the development of capabilities and skills. If consideration is given to the evaluation of labour market opportunities, almost 60 % of temporary employees assume their opportunities on the labour market have improved. A third of respondents believe there has been no change in their employability, and 8 % report that their opportunities on the labour market have worsened (see figures above).

The development of skills by temporary employees appears to lie primarily in the ability to adapt to different working contexts. The workers represent 'flexible' employees who have developed strategies for finding their way around in new working contexts again and again.

Looking to the future

It is not only in Germany that development of skills in temporary employment is an important point for discussion and organisation. In addition to formal further training opportunities, as has already been demonstrated, for temporary work in particular, opportunities to develop skills are to be found in the work itself: changing work placements open up diverse opportunities for temporary workers to develop their skills further, provided appropriate working and framework conditions exist to promote learning. Additionally, employees must be placed in such a way that they carry out activities that make it possible to develop skills.

In the future, the aspects identified in this article should be dealt with to an increased extent in the academic sphere and in practice, and plans for the development of skills should be identified. Above all, the companies in which workers are placed and temporary workers themselves should be included to a greater extent. Experiences within the framework of qualification agreements in neighbouring countries, primarily the Dutch and French examples, should have some influence on the federal approaches adopted in Germany.

The German collective wage agreements which exist to date do not provide for any further training agreements. In order to enhance learning opportunities in the expanded temporary employment market, consideration could be given to paying a certain percentage of remuneration into a further training fund. This is also recommended by the expert committee on 'Funding lifelong learning' (www.lifelonglearning.de).

However, agreement on a certain amount of money does not achieve anything by itself. This is demonstrated by the example of

the Netherlands. Rather, supportive measures for the parties involved must be agreed and at the same time models to stimulate involvement and the execution of competence development must be implemented.

The findings of the various surveys undertaken within the scope of the BIBB research project clearly identify the potential of temporary work, particularly for competence development in the workplace. Since the research project was an exploratory study, it is not possible to make any specific recommendations for action at this juncture. However, it was possible to demonstrate that the informally acquired skills and the associated recording, validation and certification should in future be taken up to a greater extent within research work and in practice by means of corresponding model projects. Future research and action requirements can be demonstrated, by way of example, using the following research questions: Which specific tools for recording and evaluating skills are suitable for use in temporary work? How can temporary workers be placed in temporary positions in future with greater regard to the issue of developing skills? How can future qualification work be organised by the temporary employment agencies? How can companies in which workers are placed be involved in the qualification work to a greater extent and how can cooperation between companies in which workers are placed and temporary employment agencies be organised with respect to the development of skills? How can models of formally organised competence development (e.g. in the form of further training courses) be linked more strongly to the informal development of skills in work? To what extent is anchoring further training, legally or in terms of collective wage agreements, possibly in a manner linked to a fund, as is the case in France and the Netherlands, also sensible and achievable in Germany?

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