

“AN INTERPRETIVE INVESTIGATION INTO WHETHER THE MOTIVATIONS OF OLDER WORKERS DIFFER FROM THOSE OF YOUNGER WORKERS.”

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ABSTRACT

Demographic shift becomes a major problem as ratio of older people is increasing in the total population of world and that leads to more number of older workforces in the total labour force which should be a blessing due to how importance older workers have at workplace. But instead of blessing, the increased number of older workforces becomes a curse for many developed and developing countries due to low participation of these older workers to work at workplace mainly because of voluntary early retirement from the work and young workers are not replacing older workers proportionately that might lead to shortage of labor supply in near future which has serious economic and social consequences. Austria is not free from such problem as recent trend shows that the rate of participation of older workers in the total workforce is in declining rate and 60% of the total workforce consists of middle age and older workers. One of many ways to retain these large numbers of older workers to work at workplace is to motivate them to work. But contrasting result in this study shows that if research is not being conducted in the area of work motivation of older workers then Austria might suffer from serious economic and social consequences in future that are not desirable.

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KEYWORDS: Older Workers, Younger Workers, Demographic Shift Work Motivation, Motivational Factors

INTRODUCTION

Motivation drew the attention of the researchers after the Hawthorne Studies conducted by Elton Mayo during 1924 to 1932 (Dickson, 1973) which compels the managers to put attention towards the motivation of the workforce that actually opens a new horizon of human relations approach to management (Bedeian, 1993). Major motivational theories include Maslow's need-hierarchy theory (Maslow, 1943), Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959), Vroom's expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), Adams' equity theory (Adams, 1965), Skinner's reinforcement theory (Skinner, 1953) which emerged after researchers being inspired by the Hawthorne Studies. Motivation of the workforce is essential for survival of the organization (Smith, 1994) as it is the workforce or employees that run the organization not the machines.

Workforce of the organization (University of Essex) is made up of both experienced and young workers i.e. older workers¹ and younger workers².

¹ The term “older worker” has been used to refer to workers from the age of 40 to those aged over 75 depending on the purpose and field of study (Bourne, 1982; Warr, 2000).

² Younger Worker refers to workers between the ages of 15 and 24 (Loughlin and Barling, 2001).

Demographical shift due to lower fertility rate and increased life expectancy, number of older population is increasing among the developed countries and as a result the potential workforce is aging (Kooij *et al.*, 2008) since the older workers will constitute 32 percent of the potential workforce in 2050 as compared to 25 percent in 2000 (United Nations, 2007). Then it will become a major challenge for the employers to retain the older workforce in the workplace since labour participation among the older workers is comparatively very low in most of the developed countries (Kooij *et al.*, 2008).

On the other hand young workers, the work force of the future (Loughlin and Barling, 2001) have been engaged in the employment since young age as statistics shows that in Austria, 67% of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are employed, and between the ages of 16 and 24, 75% of young people in Denmark and 63% of those in Sweden are employed (United Nations, 1996). So is the picture no different in United Kingdom as most of the young people complete their formal education by age of 16 (Green & Montgomery, 1988) and involve themselves in paid labour force (Loughlin and Barling, 2001) and in North America 80 % of high school going students involved in the part time working and by the end of 12th grade, 70% of the students employed themselves in more than 20 hours a week during summer term (Runyan & Zakocs, 2000) show strong labour participation among the

youth. But some of the researchers have already highlighted in their work, that young workers already exhibiting the attitude of 'working to live' over 'living to work' (Maccoby, 1995; Zemke *et al.*, 2000).

If negative attitudes of the workforce among both older and younger workers sustain towards the work place of the developed countries, then in coming days, a scenario might arise where workplace would suffer from scarce work force since work force comprises of both older and younger workers and lack of participation from either group would give rise to scarcity of the workforce that will effect the economic growth of the developed countries as according to 'The neo-classical growth model' developed by Solow (1956) and Swan (1956) pointed that increasing capital relative to labor creates economic growth i.e. labor can be more productive given more capital which leads to more economic growth. Therefore scarcity of labor would directly affect the economic growth of the developed countries.

Hence in order to develop and grow positive attitudes among both the older and younger workers it is very important to identify the factors that led to low motivation among older and younger workers towards work place. In this paper research would be conducted in Austria to identify the factors that motivate both younger and older workers to work in order to find out whether work motivation differ among the younger and older workers in Austria. It is important as both the older and younger workers constitute the total work force of the organization and if the motivation differs greatly among both the groups then obviously it will make an impact on the organization's performance. Hence on the basis of the findings, a set of possible solutions would be suggested to bridge the gap of differences in the motivation of both the working groups, so that motivated workforce can be formed in the organization at present as well as in the future. To conduct the research, interpretive approach would be adopted to explore the subject matter. Before justifying the reasons of adopting interpretive approach, it would be important to analyze the existing research philosophies and paradigms³ in management research discussed in the next section.

Significance of the Study

As mentioned above that, younger workers are not replacing older workers proportionately can lead to serious economic and social consequences. Hence

³ Paradigm is a way of examining social phenomena from which particular understandings of these phenomena can be gained and explanations attempted (Saunders *et al.*, 2007).

this study aims to identify the factors that motivate both younger and older workers to work in order to find out whether work motivation differs among the younger and older workers in Austria. It is due to develop and grow positive attitudes among both the older and younger workers as it is very important to identify the factors that led to low motivation among older and younger workers towards work place and ultimately bridging the gap of differences in the motivation of both the working groups in Austria.

Research Philosophies in Management

Aim of the researchers is to design and carry out effective and valid research (Angen, 2000) to extract desired goals from the research. But there has been long a standing debate among the researchers in the social science as to which approach is to be adopted in order to conduct the research, since 'different approaches to inquiry' are used by the researchers in wide spread field of organizational science where each approach reflects its unique basic values, assumptions, and beliefs (Evered & Louis, 1981).

Philosophy of science refers to two assumptions, one is Ontological & other one is epistemological that Easterby-Smith *et al* (2002: 28) summed up both the assumptions from the view first encapsulated by French Philosopher Auguste Comte in 1853 as "an ontological assumption, that reality is external and objective and second, an epistemological assumption, that knowledge is only of significance if it based on observation of this external reality". Apart from these two assumptions there is another school of thought known as axiological assumptions underlying each view of this world exhibiting different fundamental goals or axiologies. But the major debate has been continuing till now between the scientists of two schools of thoughts advocating 'positivist' and 'interpretive' approaches, the two of the predominant approaches to gaining knowledge in the social sciences depicting different philosophical assumptions, goals and beliefs (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

Positivism

Positivism, dominated in the research field (Anderson, 1986) constitutes the idea that social world exists externally where its properties being measured through objective methods rather than being inferred subjectively through sensation, reflection or intuition (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). The positivists tend to take a realist position in ontological assumption and assume that a single, objective reality exists independently of what individuals perceive. The social world, like the physical world, also exists independently of individuals' perceptions as a real, concrete, and unchanging structure. Reality exists as a structure, composed of relationships among its parts. The positivist approach holds a deterministic view i.e.

human behavior is determined. Some positivists modify this view and take a more stochastic approach (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

In axiological assumption the positivists' overriding goal is "explanation" via subsumption of the behavior under universal laws (Anderson, 1986; Hunt, 1983) the goal of explanation entails prediction that implies that an explanation is achieved when one demonstrates the systematic association of variables underlying a phenomenon.

In epistemological assumption, positivists take a generalizing approach to research based on their goals and their assumptions of reality, which means they seek out general, abstract laws that ideally can be applied to an infinitely large number of phenomena, people, settings, and times highlighting context-free generalization or nomothetic statements (Keat and Urry, 1975). In positivism the researchers place a high priority on identifying causal linkages as they believe that human action can be explained as the result of a real cause that temporally precedes the behavior (Hunt, 1983). As far as relationship of the researchers to the research subject is concerned it is assumed that the researcher does not influence the subject and is independent from it. Positivist researchers depend on their expertise to develop the research questions, designs, settings, and so forth. A detached stance is necessary to maintain objectivity, a prerequisite for legitimate knowledge (Bredo and Feinberg, 1982). Because the positivists believe that it is possible for researchers to stay outside their object of inquiry and minimize the control to influence it, they assume that a privileged vantage point exists from which researchers can view their subjects (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). In positivist approach the nature of data being used are mostly quantitative in nature and positivists often use experimentation in which there is an attempt to control the variables, the context, and the temporal order of events so that causal relationships can be inferred (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002).

Interpretivism

Interpretivism i.e. the interpretive approach to organizational research has been gaining increasing attention as a legitimate alternative to the more traditional positivist approach (Lee, 1991) since last quarter of twentieth century. In the ontological notion, the interpretivists believe in the existence of multiple worlds, that is, reality is essentially mental and perceived. Individuals create devices, such as theories and categories, to help them make sense of their worlds (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Reality is also socially constructed in that "all human knowledge is developed, transmitted, and maintained in social situations" (Berger and Luckman, 1967:3). Thus, multiple realities exist because of different perspectives of the individuals and groups. The

interpretivists believe that no inquiry can be conducted on one single reality because multiple realities exist and these realities are changing. The interpretive approach views people as voluntaristic that mean people actively create and interact in order to shape their environment (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

In epistemological assumption interpretivists take a more historical, particularistic approach to research; that is, they study a specific phenomenon in a particular place and time. The interpretivists seek to determine motives, meanings, reasons, and other subjective experiences that are time and context-bound. Geertz (1973) labeled this context-dependent form of explanation a "thick description." For the interpretivists, it is the particulars of a phenomenon that are of primary importance. Viewing the world holistically, the interpretivists' stance is that mutual, simultaneous shaping occurs between entities (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Rubinstein, 1981). The interpretivists do not believe that reality is composed of parts or facts. If one attempts to fragment reality, then reality is changed (Rist, 1977). The interpretivists hold that the researcher and the people under investigation interact with each other, creating a cooperative inquiry (Reason and Rowan, 1981; Wallendorf 1987). If the social reality is based on individuals' or groups' perceptions, then, in order to be able to understand those perceptions, these individuals must be involved in creating the research process. Thus, the individual who is studied becomes a participant in the experiment, guiding the research as well as supplying information. The interpretivists believe that in the social sciences the scientist is a member of the social reality (Giddens, 1976). The interpretivists' point of view, the emerging designs are better able to take into account the subject's knowledge. In interpretive approach the nature of data being used are mostly qualitative in nature and the interpretivists often use the descriptive analysis of participant observations and historical documents in their attempt to view the entities holistically, in the context of political, social, economic, cultural, and other systems (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

From the above discussion of two of the predominant approaches to conduct research in social science highlights unique characteristics and clearly reflects some of the differences among two paradigms outlined in the next section

'Positivism' Versus 'Interpretivism'

Debate among the scientists of two school of thoughts 'positivism' and 'interpretivism' is not a new issue and researchers already identified the differences between the two approaches ('positivism' and 'interpretivism') as 'objective versus subjective' (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), 'quantitative versus qualitative' (Van Maanen, 1979), outsider versus

insider (Evered and Louis, 1981), nomothetic versus idiographic (Luthans and Davis, 1982), etic versus emic (Morey and Luthans, 1984), 'generalistic vs. particularistic' (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). In order to choose the appropriate research philosophy it is important to measure the strengths and weaknesses lie in the each approaches. Next section focuses on past research in the related field with strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

PAST RESEARCHES IN THE RELATED FIELD

Past researches reveal the fact that very few studies examine the motivation of older worker to work and hence very little are known about it (Kooij *et al.*, 2008). As many as past research articles relating to motivation and value work system of young and older worker have been reviewed, it clearly highlights the use of surveys strategy associated with the deductive approach where data are collected by using questionnaire administered to sample that clearly implies the use of 'Positivist' paradigm (Taylor and Thomson, 1976; Taylor *et al.*, 1989; Tang, 1990; Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004). It is the strength of positivist paradigm that it can provide wide coverage of the range of situations, can be fast and economical and, particularly when statistics are aggregated from large samples; they may be of considerable relevance to policy decisions (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002).

But when it is intended to find the motivational factors of both younger and older worker at work place and 'motivation' falls into an area of Psychology (Brown, 2007), there direct involvement of researchers become important to conduct the research as to understand people's mind and meaning of their statements, adjust to a new issues and ideas as they emerge, and to contribute to the evolution of new theories, ability to look at how change processes over time and also the data gathering technique that is seen as natural rather than artificial (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). This is the strength of interpretivist paradigm over the weaknesses of the positivist paradigm where methods tend to be rather inflexible and artificial, not very effective in understanding processes or the significance that people attach to actions; not helpful generating theories; and because it focuses on what is, or what has been recently, make it hard for the policy maker to infer what changes and actions should take place in future (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). As Legge (1984) point out, they may only provide illusions of the 'true' impact of social policies where most of the data gathered will not be relevant to real decisions although it may be used to support the covert goals of decision makers.

Interpretive approach also has weaknesses as the data collection can be time consuming and involve more resources. The analysis and interpretation of data

may be very difficult, and this depends on the intimate, tacit knowledge of the researchers. Qualitative studies often feel very untidy because it is harder to control their pace, progress and end points. And there is also the problem that many people, especially policy makers, may give low credibility to studies based on apparently 'subjective' opinions (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). But yet in order to identify the motivational factors of both younger and older worker to work, mere collecting and analysing through usage of quantitative data to testify the hypothesis is not strong enough to draw the conclusion. When there is need of analysis of employees' minds, behaviour, perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs that play an important role in determining motivation (high/low) of the workers then statistical models developed on the basis of quantitative data are incapable of interpreting human feelings to provide a holistic view, through the own words and perceptions of the participants about how they feel, expect, understand, perceive from the social reality they belong to. Therefore in a social environment where human being can contribute actively in a world with no concrete structure then positivist approach become increasingly unsatisfactory, and indeed, inappropriate (Morgan & Smirchich, 1980). Some researchers argue that an interpretivist epistemology is highly appropriate in the case of business and management research particularly in the management field of organizational behaviour, marketing, human resource management, enquiry into leadership, teamwork (Alan, 1998; Saunders *et al.*, 2007).

It is a difficult task for researchers to choose a right research philosophy thinking one approach is better than the other. But in reality, different research philosophies are better in doing different researches. Choosing a right research philosophy mainly depends on the research questions scientists seeking answer for (Saunders *et al.*, 2007) and in this paper the research topic will examine the motivational factors of both younger and older worker in the organization. Motivation of two groups of two generations i.e. young and old, each believing in the different values, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, work values (Taylor and Thomson, 1976) hence it is important to understand the behaviour of both the working group rather than predicting the behaviour as Rubinstein (1981) stated that primary goal of interpretive approach is to understand behavior, not predicting it. Here interpretive researchers view understanding as more of a continual process rather than means to an end. From this understanding researchers will interpret their present understanding and this is a never ending process as past interpretation would be reinterpret into current interpretation on the basis of present observation of human behaviour. This current interpretation will influence the future interpretation (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988) and these interpretations

are done through medium of language. Hence considering all the arguments highlighted above strongly favours the use of interpretative epistemology as the ideal research philosophy to investigate the subject matter and 'case study' is chosen as the research strategy to carry out the research.

Case Study as Research Strategy

The research question of this paper is exploratory in nature as to seek new insights (Robson, 2002) about the work motivational factors of two working groups in Austria. Case study⁴ is absolutely opposite of the experimental strategy where research aim is to identify causal links between the different variables but capable of in-depth investigating (Saunders *et al.*, 2007) and also case study will be of particular interest if there is desire to gain a rich understanding of the context of the research and the processes being enacted (Morris and Wood, 1991). In this research, multiple case studies strategy would be adopted as to undergo in-depth case analysis and compare the findings of different studies to draw strong and relevant conclusion to empirical investigation. Yin (2003) argues that multiple case studies may be preferable to a single case study and in case of choosing single case study, research must come up with strong justification. In this research to conduct multiple case studies, three organizations would be selected where the workforce constitutes of both younger and older workers. Among the three organizations, one of them would be located in the Vienna capital city of Austria that is organization should be large and multi cultured. Two other organizations (one of them is local and other one is Multi National Company) would be selected from the Graz and Linz, important cities of Austria next to Vienna. The reasons of choosing different organizations in different cities are to explore wider range of employees and workers coming from different background, cultures, beliefs, religions and data collected from one organization would be used to assess the relevancy of data collected from another organization in order to establish reliability of the information to draw strong justification to the findings of the research question. A well constructed case study strategy can challenge an existing theory and also provide a source of new research question (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). To conduct a well structure multiple case studies emphasis should be given in the methods of data collection as sketched in the next section.

⁴ Case study is defined as "a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence" (Robson, 2002:178).

Methods of Data Collection

There are two types of data, one is qualitative (non numeric) and other one is quantitative (numeric). Both have unique technique of collecting data and each have their own strengths and weaknesses in their techniques of data collection (Smith, 1975). Researchers argue that there is no answer to the question as to which data technique method is better than the other but there is inevitable relationship of data collection technique employed in the research and the findings of the research (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). In this paper primary data would be used to conduct the research and these data would be collected through participant observation, semi-structure and in-depth interviews, suitable data collection technique for collecting qualitative data (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002) and conducting case studies (Saunders *et al.*, 2007).

Participant Observation

Participant observation⁵ is more familiar in the field of sociology and anthropology means engagement of researchers or scientists in the lives and activities of the subjects through participation and becoming member of their organization and community that enables them to gain experiences not by observing but also able to feeling it (Gill and Johnson, 2002). Participant observation is not very popular tool to use in the field of business and management research but still it can be very effective along with other methods (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). In this paper role of 'participant as observer' would be adopted, firstly because researcher can move around, observe, interview, and participate in the work as being researcher and secondly it provides many insights that only complete observer would experience without any ethical problems (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). Eileen Fairhurst (1983) used this approach in a study of employees' attitude to organization rules. When the research aims to find out the motivational factors of the employees at work place then it is very important for the researcher to observe the vivid behaviour of the employees at work place as to observe what they perceive about the organization and how they feel about their work place, when they are happy and unhappy, how they react to favourable and unfavourable situations, what motivates or demotivates them i.e. aim is to inquire from the inside (Evered and Louis, 1981). Information and data gathered from these observations will help the researcher to prepare questions for the interviews.

Interview

An interview is a purposeful discussion between two or more people (Kahn and Cannel,

⁵ Observation refers to systematic observation, recording, description, analysis, and interpretation of people's behaviour (Saunders *et al.*, 2007).

1957). The primary purpose of the interview is to understand the meanings of the interviewees attachment to the particular issues and situations where interviewer has the opportunity to observe and identify the non-verbal clues i.e. inflection of the voice, facial expressions or cloths worn by the interviewees (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002) that reveals "how individuals construct the meaning and significance of their situations...from...the complex personal framework of beliefs and values, which they have developed over their lives in order to help explain and predict events in their own world" (Stewart, 1982:45). The importance of the interview is suggested by Burgess (1982) as uncovering new clues and exploring new dimension of a problem. Semi-structured or in-depth interview are appropriate, when it becomes essential to understand the constructs of the interviewee uses as a pillar to build his or her opinions and beliefs about certain matter or situation and to gain an insight of the respondent's 'world' (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). In this research semi structured and in-depth interview would be adopted as to uncover the meaning of motivational factors for both the younger and older workforce from their own perceptions, values, and beliefs. Rosemary Stewart (1982) used this method of data collection in her research on the nature managerial work.

Limitation of the Study

Sample population chosen (relatively small) from three states of Austria can lead to one of the major limitation of the study as result obtained from this study would be used to generalize for whole of Austria.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research is already outlined in the previous sketch and one of the major limitation of this paper is to unable to retrieve past research relating to similar research question and as a result no insight was gained from the past researches relating to research methodology suitable for this research. Since there is no clear cut answer to chose right research methodology for a particular research question and scientists put emphasis on the imagination and to think of research as highly creative process (Saunders *et al.*, 2007) hence strives have been made to design an appropriate research strategy and data collection techniques to answer the research question that is no less than a challenge. Research strategy and methods of data collection suggested in the study would be able to answer the research question if research is being carried out by expert researcher as both the research strategy and data collection techniques need scientist who is highly technical, expert, sensitive enough to ensure that he or she not only understands the person's views but also at times assists individuals to explore their own beliefs in order to conduct the research.

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