The Effect of Age and Gender on Motivation to Work

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Purpose of Research

- Exploratory analysis investigating differences in workplace motivational drivers in Aust. context
- Identify general trends in motivators for
  - Older versus younger job applicants
  - Male versus female job applicants
- Build upon the UK *Happiness Index* Study
- Add to the available literature
Importance of Motivation

- Increase productivity
- Retain older workers
  - Australia’s rapidly aging workforce
- Increase engagement
  - Economic uncertainty can give rise to increased rates of disengagement, absenteeism and ‘presentee-ism’
What the Literature Says

- Generally speaking – lack of systematic study investigating the link between demographic factors (age and gender) and work motivation

Older employees

- More concerned with health, mentoring others and job security (Greller, 2000)
- Place a higher value on leisure activities (Hurd, 1996)
What the Literature Says

Older employees
- Place reduced importance on high job demands, job variety and feedback (Warr, 1997)
- Lowered motivation drive when it comes to performing new tasks (Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004)
- Less motivated by training prospects (Greller, 2000)
- Reduced concern with career advancement and forming new relationships (Greller, 2000)
2008 UK Happiness Index Study

- UK based firm City and Guilds
- Conducted for the past 5 years
- 2,000 UK employees across 20 professions
- Factors keeping people happy and motivated
- Reasons for remaining with current employer
  - 57% - Having a strong interest in their work
  - 56% - Good relationships with colleagues
  - 47% - Work-life balance
  - 44% - Salary
The Age-Earnings Profile (Lazear, 1998)

- Salary structure in which
  - *Younger* workers paid *less* than they are worth
  - *Older* workers paid *more* than they are worth
- Entices older workers to continue to work when they would have otherwise reached a plateau in their earnings potential
- Organisations assume that money is a prime motivator in retaining older workers
Aims of the Current Study

Aim of the exploratory analysis was to investigate

1. The relationship between age and motivation

2. Differences between males and females

3. The moderating effect of gender on the relationship between age and motivation
Participants

- N = 1,881 job applicants
- 1,165 (61.9%) male; 716 (38.1%) female
- Age range 20 to 62 years
- Mean age 35.6 yrs male; 31.5 yrs female
- Tested between 2003 – 2008
- Management and professional positions
Measure

- Motivation Questionnaire
  - 144 items
  - Self-report
  - 5-point Likert scale
  - 18 attributes
What is “Motivation”?

“An individual’s willingness to work harder and invest additional effort in their work”
Measure - Examples

- Need for Autonomy
  - “Being free to organise my own work”

- Desire for competition
  - “Being perceived as doing better than others”
Procedure

Three analyses

1. Correlational Analysis
   Examine relationship between age and the 18 scale scores

2. Independent Sample t-tests
   Examine gender differences by looking at the mean differences between male and female averaged scores

3. Hierarchical Regression Analysis
   Examine the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between age and motivation
Results

- Motivational needs vary for younger as compared with older individuals
- Males and females are driven by different motivational sources
Results – Analysis 1

Effect of Age

- Motivational needs of younger versus older employees differ significantly ($p < .01$) on 9 of the 18 scales
Results – Analysis 1

- Autonomy ($r = .22$)
- Personal Growth ($r = -.22$)
- Progression ($r = -.22$)
- Power ($r = .20$)
- Commercial Outlook ($r = .17$)
- Personal Principles ($r = .12$)
- Immersion in work ($r = .10$)
- Competition ($r = -.10$)
- Fear of Failure ($r = -.07$)
Results – Analysis 2

Gender Differences

- Males and females recorded different strengths on 9 motivational drivers ($p < .01$)
## Results – Analysis 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MQ Scale</th>
<th>Mean (Min. 8; Max. 40)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Male: 30.57, Female: 29.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Failure</td>
<td>Male: 27.25, Female: 25.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Male: 31.25, Female: 29.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion</td>
<td>Male: 22.09, Female: 21.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Outlook</td>
<td>Male: 30.85, Female: 29.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Male: 22.99, Female: 22.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Male: 31.74, Female: 32.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease and Security</td>
<td>Male: 30.39, Female: 31.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Growth</td>
<td>Male: 33.69, Female: 34.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results – Analysis 3

Moderating Effect of Gender

- For females, 4 scales recorded significant change in $r$-squared when the interaction term (age x gender) was entered
Results – Analysis 3

Older as compared to younger females have

- A greater need for
  - Flexibility ($r = .17$)
  - Intrinsic Job Interest ($r = .10$)

- Less of a need for
  - Recognition ($r = -.19$)
  - Ease and Security ($r = -.15$)
Key Findings

- Support for *age* and *gender* differences in motivational needs
- Also, for women, 4 motivational needs differ for older as compared with younger females
Comparison with the Literature

- Older as compared with younger workers have a *reduced* motivational need for
  - Personal growth and training opportunities
    - Supports Warr’s (1997) and Kanfer & Ackermann’s (2004) assertion that older workers have a lowered motivational drive to perform new tasks
Comparison with the Literature

- Older as compared with younger workers have a **reduced** motivational need for
  - Career progression
    - Supports Greller’s (2000) finding that graduates *perceive* older workers to be less concerned with career advancement
  - Ease of working conditions and job security
    - Failed to support Greller’s (2000) finding that older workers attach more importance to job security
Comparison with the Literature

- Older as compared with younger workers have an *increased* motivational need for
- Immersion
  - Failed to support Hurd’s (1996) conclusion that older workers attach a higher value to leisure activities
Comparison with the Literature

- Older *females* have a *reduced* motivational need for
- Recognition
  - Supports Warr’s (1997) proposal that older workers have a reduced need for their efforts to be acknowledged
Comparison with the Literature

- **No relationship** between age and
  - Material reward
    - Supports 2008 UK *Happiness Index* where salary failed to be one of the top 3 motivators to remain in a role (Cooper, 2008)
    - Questions the value of the steep age-earnings profile outlined by Lazear (1998)
Explaining Variations with Literature

- Some possibilities
  - Type of Analysis used?
  - Characteristics of the Sample?
  - Differences in how motivation and how the different motivational drivers were defined?
Implications and Practical Applications

- **Generalisable** trends in people’s motivational needs based on age and gender
- **Money** may not be the prime driver!
Implications and Practical Applications

That said:

- Consider needs on an *individual basis*
- Use *motivational profiling* during selection, development or performance reviews
Limitations

- Although results were statistically significant, the effect sizes were small
- Sample not representative of the Australia working population at large
  - Management and professional applicants
  - Restricted age range
    - Older employees under-represented
- Not longitudinal, therefore we do not know if it was *age* or *generational effects* at play
Future Research Directions

- Longitudinal study
  - Investigate whether age differences are merely generational, or whether they change over time

- Effect of individual life circumstances
  - Investigate life circumstances (i.e., health, family status, ethnic background, etc)
  - Classify participants according to life phases or career/personal aspirations
Questions