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WORK ALIENATION: DOES DEMOGRAPHICS MATTER? A STUDY AMONG TRAINING AND MANAGEMENT CON- SULTING ORGANIZATIONS IN EGYPT

Key Words

*Work Alienation;
Employee Alienation;
Demographic Studies.*

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which the demographic variables would affect employees' feelings of alienation towards work. The research used two industries, namely training and management consulting organizations in Egypt. Questionnaires were administered to 300 employees working in this field to test the role of demographics with regard to the feelings of work alienation. Research results revealed no significant differences between gender and the level of work alienation, a positive relationship between age and the level of work alienation, a significant difference between marital status and the level of work alienation, a significant difference between employees occupying various managerial positions and the level of work alienation, and no significant difference among employees with different educational backgrounds and the level of work alienation. It is proposed that future research should examine more demographic variables such as income level as well as other different industries to enhance generalization of the results. The findings furnish an explanation for the level of work alienation in relation to different demographic variables. This helps create a structural body of work tied to demographics rather than reliance on individual predictors.

Introduction

It is known and well understood that employees' assessment and

attitude towards their jobs and organizations will directly influence their

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productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness. All positive work related attitudes such as: job satisfaction, organization commitment, work alienation and many others have been of a major concern to many scholars and researchers. The word "alienation" is derived from the Latin word "alienare", meaning estrangement (Mann, 2001). Hajada (1995) was the one who used the term alienation to refer to "the state or the process through which an individual becomes separated in various degrees from the social reality". Alienation as a disconnect from one's work has been referred to as the opposite of engagement (Hirschfeld et al., 2000), satisfaction (Etzioni, 1961) and commitment (Seybolt et al., 1976). Work-related alienation is a multidimensional complex concept for which simple definitions, research strategies and solutions do not exist with a unified agreed consensus. In this study, the researcher looked at work alienation as one of the critical job attitudes in relation to different demographic variables. Demographics are one of the significant dimensions that directly impact the level of work alienation possessed by employees.

An Overview on Work Alienation

The origins of work alienation go back to Marx. Marx (1963) argues that people will look for creativity in most of the activities that they prac-

tice; creativity is a need mostly attained within work. In his economic and philosophical Manuscripts of 1884, Marx explained the differences between three forms of alienation: alienation from the product of work, alienation in the process of production, and alienation from the society. He viewed alienation as a form of separation of the workers from ownership. According to him, alienation is a condition in which man becomes isolated and cut off from the product of his work, having given up his desire for self-expression and control over his own fate at work. Marx (1865) conceptualized alienation as losing the control over self and society with disgust.

Other scholars viewed alienation as a situation mainly based on disgust and isolation (O' Driscoll et al., 1996). Bickford (2000) defined alienation as a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an "alien", where one becomes estranged from himself, does not experience himself as a center of his world, as a center of his own act, but his acts and their consequences become his masters whom he may worship.

Korman et al. (2000, 2001) viewed alienation from a different perspective. They have considered alienation as a

core phenomenon sub-divided into personal alienation and social alienation. In their view, personal alienation reflects "the degree to which the person feels that there is a separation between his/her real being and his/her everyday activities. Such an estrangement generates an impoverishment of the individuals' sense of self, with a consequent growth in self-destructiveness, the adoption of meaningless choices, and an apathetic non-involvement in life". By contrast, social alienation involves "an estrangement from other groups and people, with a consequent lack of interactional effectiveness, a lack of concern for group goals and the extreme aggression and hostility towards others". In other words, their view "to be alone" is the essence of social alienation (Korman et al., 1981: 344).

Most alienation studies were strongly influenced by the work of Melvin Seeman. Seeman (1959) clarified the alienation concept by identifying five main dimensions, namely powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, self-estrangement, and normlessness. According to Blauners' study (1964):

- Powerlessness exists when workers feel that they have little control over work activities.
- Meaninglessness exists when workers feel that they contribute little to the overall production and accord-

ingly they do not perceive the importance of their role in it.

- Isolation refers to the absence of the sense of identity with the organizational work, goals and work-mates.
- Self- Estrangement is present when workers feel that their work is not self-fulfilling and not self-rewarding.
- Normlessness was not actually related to any specific dimension.

More recently, scholars argued against the adequacy of these dimensions and their relatedness to explaining alienation (Mottaz, 1981; Kanungo, 1979; Overend, 1975).

Work alienation was conceptualized as a psychological construct (Kobasa *et al.*, 1982; Kanungo 1982, 1979) that incorporates the subjective experience of the employee. Several studies looked at the causes leading to work alienation. These causes included: the structural elements of centralization and formalization (Organ *et al.*, 1981; Greene 1978; Allen *et al.* 1977; Blauner, 1964; Aiken *et al.*, 1966). Tasks that contributed to less autonomy have been tested and treated as contributing to alienation (Mottaz, 1981; Blauner, 1964). Individual differences as a cause of work alienation were also explored (Lang, 1985; Mottaz, 1981; Korman *et al.* 1981; Dean 1961).

On the other hand, the outcomes of alienation can be negative for both the employees and their organizations. Alienation has been found to be negatively related to major job attitudes, namely affective commitment and job satisfaction (Hirschfeld *et al.*, 2000; Hirschfeld *et al.*, 2000). By contrast, alienation was found to be positively related to tardiness, effort and performance (Cummings *et al.*, 1977). Workers who were alienated had little control over their own work, found little self-fulfillment in doing their jobs and few social connections within the surrounding working environment (Kohn *et al.*, 1982; Hodson, 1996).

Work Alienation and Demographics

Demographics are the characteristics of human population. Demography is a relatively small discipline that was brought by the establishment of the Population Association of America in 1931. Ever since, the studies on demography have witnessed a growing progress of success in many scientific endeavors (Morgan *et al.*, 2001). Studies concerned with demographics are often used to provide a close insight into the opportunities that exist within a specific work domain. Labor demographics include variables such

as: age, gender, management level, marital status, among others.

Through the review of various studies on demographics and work alienation, a conclusion can be drawn that few studies were concerned with the study of demographics and work alienation, particularly in the Middle East region. Accordingly this research will try to explore some demographic variables in relation to work alienation in order to contribute to the science of work alienation through the application to a different, unexplored domain, the Middle East, Egypt specifically.

Several important studies have explored demographic variables such as age, gender, education, race, income, marital status and urban-rural background in relation to alienation (Kohn 1976; Seybolt *et al.*, 1976; Shepard *et al.*, 1974a; Shepard, 1971; Kirsch *et al.*, 1971; Seeman, 1967).

Through the review of literature, it was found that there was no relation between occupational type (management level) and alienation (Yankelovich, 2002). A negative relationship between age and alienation was an agreed consensus among many scholars (Dean, 2000; Korman *et al.*, 1981; Katzell, 1979; Kirsch *et al.*, 1971; Blauner, 1964). A negative relationship was found between education and alienation (Rosner *et al.*, 1991;

Kirsch *et al.* 1971; Blauner, 1964). Gender was found to have minimum influence on the level of alienation among employees (Seeman *et al.* 2000). On the other hand, (Korman *et al.*, 1981) found that married women were more personally alienated than single ones.

Research Methods

Procedure

The researcher collected data from employees working in the training and management consulting organizations located in Cairo governorate, Egypt by a professional association specialized in data collection. Participants who filled the questionnaires were full-time employees who were contacted by e-mail and invited to participate. To increase the participation, potential respondents were informed that the employees who will actually complete the questionnaires would receive gift certificates to account for their time and effort. Because of the specific nature of the research questions, the data were collected by using one tool, namely a questionnaire. In order to minimize the common method variance (CMV) issues, (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012) procedural remedies were used. This was done by explaining to the participants that all data collected will be treated in a

confidential manner and will only be used for the purpose of the research. The questionnaire also included questions that were not related to the study to decrease the availability, salience, and relevance of previous responses (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003: 888).

Participants

The training and management consulting sectors were the chosen sectors to which the study was applied. The review of previously published data about these two sectors revealed that the employees generally possessed a relative degree of homogeneity as they shared almost similar social class, they lived in Cairo and Giza governorates, and they enjoy relatively close health care systems, salary and incentive schemes. The total number of employees working in these sectors is 2000. It is worth mentioning that the researcher tried to schedule one-to-one interviews with the key personnel and employees inside these organizations to gain a better insight into the feelings of alienation. Nevertheless, this was not met by acceptance as most of the organizations considered such interviews as related to confidential work practices. Due to the inability to cover the total population, the research depended on a proportion stratified random sample. A number of 320 questionnaires were distributed and those who agreed com-

pleted the electronic questionnaires. In total, 300 complete and valid questionnaires were received. The response rate was 93.75%. The questionnaires were completed by employees working in various occupational levels. Such variety of hierarchical positions is favorable for the generalization of the research findings (Blauner, 1964). The respondents' demographics are shown in the following Table.

Measures

Korman *et al.*, (1981) original alienation scale was administered for the purpose of the study. All the research questions were anchored on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The demographic variables the study was concerned

with are: age, gender, marital status, management level, and educational background.

Research Hypotheses and Statistical Results

Based on the literature review addressed above, particularly the previous studies that looked at the relationship between demographic variables and work alienation, the research hypotheses were put forward. The following section will address the research hypotheses, the statistical analysis and the results for each hypothesis.

Hypothesis One: It is expected that there will be no significant difference

Table 1
shows the Frequency Distribution for the demographic research variables

Demographic Variables		Frequency	Percent in the sample
Gender	Males	192	64
	Females	108	36
Age Groups	20-29	74	24.7
	30-39	154	51.3
	40-45	52	17.3
	Above 50	20	6.7
Marital Status	Single	105	35
	Married	149	49.7
	Divorced	46	15.3
Management Level	Non - Managerial	157	52.3
	Middle Management	125	41.7
	Top Management	18	6
Education Level	University Graduate	208	69.3
	Masters' Holders	92	30.7

between males and females in the level of work alienation which they possess.

Descriptive statistics is employed for the gathered data by calculating the mean value and standard deviation. Mann-Whitney test was used to compare two independent groups. The results are shown in the following Table:

The results in the above Table show that there is no significant difference between males and females with respect to the level of work alienation they possessed. These results could be attributed to the fact of having a working environment that fosters a level of equality among both males and females. No discrimination

practices are taking place and this in return helps employees to avoid problems of gender differences. Accordingly, hypothesis one can be accepted.

Hypothesis Two: It is expected that there will be a negative relationship between age and the level of work alienation.

Descriptive statistics is employed for the gathered data by calculating the mean value and standard deviation. Kruskal-Wallis test, one way ANOVA non-parametric methods were used to analyze the results. The following Tables show the statistical results.

Table 2
Mann-Whitney's results with Respect to Gender and Work Alienation

Gender	Mean Ranks	Descriptive Statistics	
		Mean	Standard Deviation
Male	145.13	2.633	1.102
Female	160.05	2.811	1.127
Mann-Whitney (Z) = 1.431, Sig = 0.153, p < 0.05			

Table 3
Kruskal-Wallis' Results with Respect to Age and Work Alienation

Age Group Symbol	Age Group	Kruskal -Wallis Test		Descriptive Statistics	
		Mean Ranks	Chi-Square (df)	Mean	Standard Deviation
a	20-29	104.2	69.475*	2.126	0.816
b	30-39	141.09		2.519	0.982
c	40-49	207.91		3.509	1.073
d	Above 50	244.95		4.081	0.841
* Denotes that Kruskal-Wallis test is significant at 0.01 level of significance					

Table 4
Detailed Mann-Whitney's Results with Respect to Age and Work Alienation

Age Group Comparisons*	Mann-Whitney	
	Z	Significance
aXb	3.306	0.001, $p < 0.01$
aXc	6.266	0.000, $p < 0.01$
aXd	5.758	0.000, $p < 0.01$
bXc	5.079	0.000, $p < 0.01$
bXd	5.207	0.000, $p < 0.01$
cXd	2.065	0.039, $p < 0.05$

* Letters a, b,c,d denote the age groups shown in Table (3)

The results shown in Table (3) and Table (4) indicate that there are significant differences in the level of work alienation held among the various age groups. Elder employees tend to enjoy a higher level of work alienation. This could be explained by the fact that younger employees tend to enjoy a greater opportunity to socialize and become more engaged in social work-related activities. This allows them to get better chances to interact with work settings and workmates. In return, this helps to reduce the level of work alienation among them. On the other hand, as people get older, they tend to have more life obligations and a decreased opportunity to extend their social network with their friends and workmates. Accordingly, hypothesis two can be rejected.

Hypothesis Three: It is expected that there will be no significant difference between single, married and divorced

employees and the level of work alienation that they possess.

Descriptive statistics is employed for the gathered data by calculating the mean value and standard deviation. Kruskal-Wallis test, one way ANOVA non-parametric methods and Mann-Whitney test were used to analyze the results. The following Tables show the statistical results.

The results shown in Table (5) indicate that there are significant differences in the level of work alienation held among single, married and divorced employees. Single employees tend to enjoy a lower level of work alienation when compared to married and divorced employees. This could be attributed to the fact that single employees enjoy lower levels of financial and life commitment obligations. They tend to have a better opportunity to interact with work without the worries of personal life and societal

Table 5
Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney's Results with Respect to Martial Status
and Work Alienation

Marital Status	Kruskal-Wallis Test		Descriptive Statistics		Comparison Groups	Mann-Whitney	
	Mean Ranks	Chi-Square (d.f)	Mean	Standard Deviation		Z	Significance
Single (S)	120.39		2.329	0.965	SxM	4	0.000, $p < 0.01$
Married (M)	165.26	19.667*	2.893	1.167	SxD	3.48	0.001, $p < 0.01$
Divorced (D)	171.42		2.905	1.051	MxD	0.31	0.757, $p < 0.05$
* Denotes that Kruskal-Wallis test is significant at 0.01							

obligations. They have the chance to enjoy more leisure time, which fosters the ability to enjoy work with a free mind. Accordingly, hypothesis three can be rejected.

Hypothesis Four: It is expected that there will be a significant difference among the employees in the various management levels and the level of work alienation that they possess.

Descriptive statistics is used for the gathered data by calculating the mean value and standard deviation. Kruskal-Wallis test, one way ANOVA non-parametric methods and Mann-Whitney test were used to analyze the results. The following Tables show the statistical results.

The results shown in Table (6) indicate that there are significant differences in the level of work alienation held among employees occupying various management positions. The results reveal that

top-management employees held a higher level of work alienation compared to non-managerial and middle-management employees. This result confirms the idea that the more responsible and accountable an employee becomes, the more one tends to feel inability to enjoy a close relationship with work settings and colleagues. The sense of feeling committed and engaged in the decision-making process gives an opportunity for witnessing an increased level of work alienation. Accordingly, hypothesis four can be accepted.

Hypothesis Five: It is expected that there will be a significant difference among the employees who hold various educational levels and the level of work alienation that they possess.

Descriptive statistics is used for the gathered data by calculating the mean value and standard deviation. Mann-Whitney test was used to analyze the

Table 6
Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney's Results with Respect to Management Level and Work Alienation

Management Level	Kruskal-Wallis Test		Descriptive Statistics		Comparison Groups	Mann-Whitney	
	Mean Ranks	Chi-Square (d.f)	Mean	Standard Deviation		Z	Significance
Non-Managerial (N)	120.98		2.328	0.965	NxM	5.192	0.000, $p < 0.01$
Middle-Management (M)	173.92	48.866*	2.893	1.167	NxT	5.43	0.000, $p < 0.01$
Top - Management (T)	245.33		2.905	1.112	MxT	3.67	0.000, $p < 0.01$
* Denotes that Kruskal-Wallis test is significant at 0.01							

results. The following Tables show the statistical results.

The results shown in Table (7) indicate that there are no significant differences in the level of work alienation held among employees with various educational backgrounds. This result can be attributed to the fact that the affective component of attitudes can be even among employees regardless of their educational background. Accordingly, hypothesis five can be rejected.

Discussion

In this study, work alienation is discussed as one of the most significant work-related attitudes that directly affects the overall employees' perception and evaluation of work. It has looked at the demographic vari-

ables and the role they can possess in increasing or decreasing the level of work alienation that employees possess. Most of the studies on work alienation emerged in the 1970s and 1980s with little focus on demographic variables. By focusing on demographic variables, this study complements previous research in exploring the relationship between demographic variables and work alienation. The research findings have revealed:

- a) No significant differences between males and females in the level of work alienation that they possessed. This is somehow in agreement with Seeman *et al.* (2000), who also confirmed that gender had a minimum influence on work alienation.

Table 7
Mann-Whitney's Results with respect to Educational Level and Work Alienation

Educational Level	Mean Ranks	Descriptive Statistics	
		Mean (M)	Standard Deviation
University Graduate	147.5	2.656	1.079
Masters	157.29	2.792	1.184
Mann-Whitney (Z) = 0.903, Significance = 0.367, $p > 0.05$			

- b) A positive relationship between age and the level of work alienation held among employees. This finding contradicts the previous work of (Dean 2000; Korman *et al.* 1981; Katzell 1979; Kirsch *et al.* 1971; Blauner 1964), who concluded a negative relationship between age and work alienation.
- c) A significant difference between single, married and divorced employees and the level of work alienation that they possessed.
- d) A positive, significant difference between employees occupying various managerial positions and the level of work alienation. This contradicts Yankelovich (2002), who found a negative relationship between managerial positions and the level of work alienation.
- e) No significant difference in the level of work alienation among employees with various educational backgrounds. This disagrees with the work of (Rosner *et al.*, 1991; Kirsch *et al.*, 1971; Blauner, 1964), who found a negative relationship between educational backgrounds and the level of work alienation.

These findings can better be understood and explained by looking at the nature of work in the training and management consulting organizations in Egypt. Most of these organizations would adopt contemporary management trends to enhance a better quality of work life for their employees. These organizations care about the well-being and the feelings that employees hold towards their organizations. Most of these organizations engage in one-to-one feedback sessions with their employees about improving the quality of work offerings to ensure that the em-

ployees are satisfied. Accordingly, the results conform to the researcher's view that work alienation is a psychological construct that is basically influenced by self-expression. Self-expression during such feedback sessions could mean, in the mind of the employee, a blend of autonomy and challenge. Work settings whereby the exercise of freedom and flexibility are practiced will help in finding more appropriate results with respect to understanding if demographic variables affect the level of work alienation.

Therefore, the findings offer a contribution to the field of work alienation as it has explored a new, uncovered area, particularly Egypt, as representing the Middle East. The research shows that demographics play a key role in the level of work alienation held among employees. This finding can assist organizations mainly when deciding on their recruitment and selection of structural settings which, in return, would support creating a working environment with minimum work alienation drawbacks and repercussions.

Conclusion

The results of this research show that demographic variables affect the level of work alienation held by employees inside the workplace. Work alienation is a feeling or a sense of de-

attachment from the organization and the surrounding working environment. Organizations will be affected by employees' feeling alienated as this will either directly or indirectly affect the overall organizational effectiveness and efficiency. We propose set of recommendations that might help organizations reduce work alienation and its unforeseen consequences. Organizations should:

- ensure a sense of clarity and transparency within the communication process;
- foster open door management policies whereby employees are welcomed and encouraged to disclose their work-related concerns and issues;
- create reate a zone of negotiation between managers and employees which can be a crucial predictor of implicit alienation feelings that could be turned into serious explicit undesired behaviour if remedy does not take place;
- create and foster organizational rituals and norms as this helps in the development of a positive organizational culture, which in return allows for better communication and reduced sense of work alienation;
- work together with the management team to promote the sense of ownership and belonging to the workplace;

- Encourage the sense of "us, we, our" instead of "I, mine, me";
- foster employees' needs to feel appreciated and the feeling that they are still significant to the organizational success; and
- use personal and group feedback sessions to gain a better insight into the employees' feelings of alienation towards the workplace.

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