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Motivating Public Sector Employees: Evidence from Greece

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History</p> <p>Received 19 January 2017 Accepted 7 March 2017</p> <p><i>JEL Classifications</i> M12, M54, O15</p> <p>Keywords: Motivation, Generations, Public Sector, Greece</p>	<p>Purpose: The object of this research is to investigate work motivating factors in the public sector in Greece, as well as to study demographic attributes, placing emphasis on age and gender as determinants of employee motives.</p> <p>Design/methodology/approach: To answer our research questions, a questionnaire was distributed at the beginning of 2015 to a public-sector organization in central Greece. A total of 318 anonymous survey responses were collected and analysed with SPSS.</p> <p>Findings: In the public organization under survey, the leading employee motives are an increase in salaries, opportunities for hierarchical advancement in the organization, as well as the development of personal skills. Moreover, motivational differences are noted among Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y.</p> <p>Research limitations/implications: As the present study has been conducted on a single public organization, awareness should be raised as far as the generalizability of the results providing useful insights for further exploration.</p> <p>Originality/value: Limited research has been conducted in the Greek public sector comparing motives among generations.</p>

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1. Introduction

Motivation remains one of the major challenges that corporations face today, especially when it must be combined with the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization (Manolopoulos, 2008). Originating from the Latin term “movere” meaning to move, Islam and Zaki H.j. Ismail (2008) indicate that “[m]otivation is what moves us from boredom to interest” (p. 344). The issue of work motivation is fundamental for management not only on theoretical, but also on a practical basis (Steers et al., 2004) as it impacts on employee performance (Mitchell, 1982). According to Wiley (1997), employers should be conscious of the factors that motivate their employees in order to secure corporate success. Besides, attracting and retaining motivated employees in a better way than the rivals do, organizations could have the chance to gain competitive advantage (Kultalahti & Liisa Viitala, 2014; Steers et al., 2004). Despite the importance of work motivation, Steers et al. (2004) noted that theoretical advancements on this issue have diminished in recent years even if

serious transformations have occurred in the workplace. Labor diversification, the rise of information technology and team working are some of the changes that corporations face today (Steers et al., 2004) that could have an impact on workforce motivation. The objective of this work is to examine Greece public sector employee motives, as well as to investigate demographic attributes and hierarchical position as determinants of employee incentives.

2. Theoretical background

Motivation is a complex notion to be accurately defined, however Pinder (1998 as cited in Meyer et al., 2004:992) has described it as “a set of energetic forces that originates both within as well as beyond an individual’s being, to initiate work-related behavior, and to determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration”. A number of studies have been conducted in order to detect the ways in which employees are motivated (Houston, 2000; Wright, 2001), nevertheless the lack of

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research in the public sector has previously been highlighted (Wright, 2001; Manolopoulos 2007). Wiley (1997), reviewing employees motivating preferences, concluded that good salaries, recognition for their work, security, appealing work and chances of promotion and development in the company are the highest work motivators. However, research on private and public sector demonstrates contracting results, especially at managerial positions (Houston, 2000; Wright, 2001). For example, financial rewards are supposed to motivate private workforce more than public sector labor (Houston, 2000). On the other hand, job security is considered to be less important for private sector employees despite the fact that recent studies have found no disparities between the two areas (Lyons et al., 2006).

Anderfuhren-Biget et al. (2010), studying motivation of employees in the public field, have indicated that this has been explored from at least two different viewpoints. The first approach is based on "a canny maximization of self-interest" (Sen, 1995:2) of employees, aiming at the satisfaction of extrinsic requirements. Extrinsic motivation is usually referred to as fulfilling one's needs, mainly through financial rewards (Osterloh & Frey, 2000). The second approach is associated with the Public Service Motivation (PSM) construct, proposing that public sector workforce is prompted by higher-order incentives (Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2010; Perry & Wise, 1990). In fact, compassion and the sense of duty towards society have been found as some of the intrinsic motives of public workforce (Perry et al., 2010; Manolopoulos, 2008). However, previous research that was carried out in the extended public sector found wages and security to be the driving forces in employee motivation (Manolopoulos, 2007). Another interesting finding is that age is an attribute that impacts on motivation (Manolopoulos, 2007) which is one of the reasons the present study has focused on different motivating preferences among generations.

Indeed, Wong et al (2008) studied the differences in motivating factors among three generational groups - Baby Boomers, Generation X (GenXers) and Generation Y (GenYers) - and found significant variances in power, promotion opportunities and attachment. A generational group can be described as a group of individuals sharing similar years of birth, and as a result, have been acquainted with similar social and historical circumstances (Solnet et al., 2012; Wong et al., 2008). The accurate clarification of these age sets in terms of the years of birth demonstrates some divergence among research (Parry & Urwin, 2011). According to Jurkiewicz (2000), Baby Boomers were born from 1946 to 1962, members of Generation X were born from 1963 to 1981, while members of Generation Y, which are often referred to as Nexters, Millennials, iGeneration, Echo Boom Generation or the Nexus Generation, were born between 1982 and 2000 (Wong et al, 2008; Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008). As Martin (2005) indicates, GenYers often call themselves as the Nothing-Is-Sacred Generation, the Searching-for-an-Identity Generation, the Wannabees and CyberKids. Literature also refers to Generation Z, with members born after 1996 (Montana & Petit, 2008).

Appelbaum et al. (2005) studied 15 motivation factors for Generation X and Baby Boomers, and found that a high salary and security are the most important

factors for both groups. Additionally, Jurkiewicz (2000), studying Baby Boomers and Generation X in public organizations found that the members of the two generations have more similarities than differences. On the other hand, Kunreuther (2003) found differences in motivation between Baby Boomers and Generation X regarding their needs for work-life balance, as well as their viewpoints of the future. Tulgan (as cited in Jurkiewicz, 2000) indicates that members of Generation X are motivated by the chances of personal development, team working and the recompense of innovation, among other factors. Bright (2008) mentions that public sector organizations have already started promoting strategies to engage Generation X subsequent to the Baby Boomers retirements, while the understanding of Generation Y is also important in today's business environment, as they already constitute 25% of the worldwide population and will dominate the workplaces in the forthcoming years (Kultalahti & Liisa Viitala, 2014).

In regards to Generation Y, literature highlights that it is characterized by the "want it all" and "want it now" attitude (Ng et al., 2010: 282), including captivating work with good monetary rewards, fast promotion, playing also an important role in the society, and placing emphasis on work/life balance (Ng et al., 2010). According to Kultalahti and Liisa Viitala, (2014) Generation Y is generally motivated by flexibility in their working hours, a good workplace environment, and chances of development at work, as well as by a sympathetic supervisor, highlighting that there are indications that Generation Y differs from the others (Kultalahti & Liisa Viitala, 2014).

According to Montana and Petit (2008), Generations X, Y and Z have distinctive social features. Generations X and Y are alike in many attributes but also diverge in some case; members of Generation Y are more likely to quit their job after 2-3 years, as a result of seeing their parents fail to keep their job, despite their company loyalty. Moreover, Generation Z is likely to quit even faster than Generation Y. This is an important challenge for organizations, and the need to examine their motivational preferences is intense.

Examining motivational attributes in the public sector as well as possible differences among the generation groups, this study will search also for variances among hierarchical position and gender. In terms of hierarchical position, a small proportion of research has been performed, indicating a positive relationship with Public Service Motivation (PSM) (Desmarais & Gamassou, 2014). Indeed, Desmarais and Gamassou (2014) concluded that there are disparities in motivation in relation to hierarchical level, placing emphasis on the division of personnel management policies in public institutions. Moreover, Camilleri's study (2007) found that the more an employee raises in the institution's hierarchy, the more the PSM is reinforced. Hierarchical position has also been found to differentiate work motivation between public and private sector (Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007) employees.

Camilleri (2007) studied gender, among others, in relation to PSM demonstrating differences between males and females, verifying to a certain degree, Naff and Crum' results (1999 as cited in Camilleri, 2007) that females score higher in PSM. Manolopoulos (2007)

studying work motivation in the extended public sector in Greece suggested that women are motivated more from extrinsic incentives.

The research questions of this work are:

RQ1: What are the motivating factors of employees in the public sector?

RQ2: Are there any divergences in motives among different hierarchical levels and gender?

RQ3: Are there any differences in motivating attributes among Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y?

3. Research Method

The object of this study is to explore the motivating factors in the public sector as well as to investigate demographic attributes and hierarchical position as determinants of employee motives. A questionnaire was developed and distributed at the beginning of 2015 to members of a public-sector organization in central Greece. A total of 318 anonymous survey responses were collected and analyzed with SPSS.

Each participant was requested to rate 18 motivating factors on a Likert scale from one to five; rate 1 corresponds to 'lowest motivating', and five to 'highest motivating'. Furthermore, some demographic questions were also made.

4. Results

Our sample is composed of 42.5% males and 57.5% females with an average age of 42.4 years. In terms of hierarchical position, almost half of the respondents are in the middle level (51.88%) and as expected, employees up in the higher positions are typically older. However, the striking point is that the top managers are on average 40 years old, which is less than the mean age of our sample. In terms of educational level, a large proportion of our respondents had completed higher education (41.19%); 35.22% are holders of postgraduate master's degrees. Moreover, 7.86% of our sample have a Ph.D. Their monthly income varies from €601 to €1000 (30.19%) and from €1001 to €2000 (40.88%), while 10.1% earn €2000 to €3000 per month. There are also 6 respondents with income above €3000, that are expected to be the top managers of the organization.

Using descriptive statistics the mean average of each motivating factor is shown below in table 1. As expected, the highest employee motives are a wage raise (mean=4.03) and promotion opportunities (mean=3.86), as well as the development of personal skills (mean=3.75). On the other hand, praise (mean=2.75), power associated with a job position (mean=2.95), and job rotation (mean=3.09) are ranked lower. The average score for helping one's country is 3.27 which is low compared to the other factors.

In an effort to comprehend if there was a difference between position in hierarchy, a non-parametric test was carried out. Comparing the means among three or more datasets, ANOVA test is usually performed. However, as our data does not follow the normal distribution, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used instead of ANOVA (Elliott & Hynan, 2011). As displayed in table 2, there are

differences in factors such as praise (p-value =0.000), additional day off (p-value =0.000), job rotation (p-value =0.000), security (p-value =0.000) and flexible working hours (p-value =0.001). Employees in higher hierarchical position scored lower on such incentives.

Table 1: Frequencies

	N	Mean
Wage raise	318	4.03
Promotion opportunities	318	3.86
Personal skills development	318	3.75
Work environment	318	3.73
Performance assessment	318	3.63
Link Wage - Productivity	318	3.60
Initiatives	318	3.58
Task specification	318	3.58
Security	318	3.55
Flexible working hours	318	3.55
Opportunity to help	318	3.52
Training	318	3.48
Opportunity to help the country	318	3.27
Team-working	318	3.25
Additional day off	318	3.20
Job rotation	318	3.09
Power	318	2.95
Praise	318	2.75

Table 2: Test Statistics ^{a,b}

	Praise	Additional day off	Job rotation	Security	Flexible working hours
Chi-Square	26.021	36.450	31.694	46.036	21.778
df	6	6	6	6	6
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Hierarchical position

Moreover, in order to examine the differences in motives between the genders, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted. This test is a non-parametric one and is similar to the *t test* for normally distributed data, ascertaining the significance of deviation between the two categories (Jurkiewicz, 2000). As is demonstrated in table 3, there are differences in incentives such as work environment (p-value =0.001), praise (p-value =0.003), training (p-value =0.039) and flexible working hours (p-value =0.003). Females scored higher on each of these factors.

Finally, searching for disparities among generations, the data were tested based on the generation that the respondents belong to. The variables were transformed according to the age; Generation X includes those that were born from 1963 to 1981, which means that in 2015, when the research was conducted, the participants of this generation were 34 to 52 years old. Similarly, Baby

Boomers were born between 1946 and 1962 and consequently this generation group consists of participants older than 52 years old. Generation Y constitutes the remainder of the employees.

Table 3: Test Statistics^a

	Work environment	Praise	Training	Flexible working hours
Mann-Whitney U	9901.000	10026.500	10769.500	10110.000
Wilcoxon W	19081.000	19206.500	19949.500	19290.000
Z	-3.271	-2.975	-2.060	-2.922
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.003	.039	.003

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

The majority of our sample is GenXers (67.6%) while the rest of them are Baby Boomers (16%) and GenYers (16.4%). To test our hypothesis, the Kruskal-Wallis test was performed. Differences are noted in seven motivating factors (table 4); promotion opportunities (p-value =0.008), praise (p-value =0.000), development of personal skills (p-value =0.001), performance assessment (p-value =0.006), training (p-value =0.012), security (p-value =0.000) and flexible working hours (p-value =0.002).

Table 4: Test Statistics^{a,b}

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Promotion opportunities	9.702	2	0.008
Praise	18.819	2	0.000
Personal skills	13.123	2	0.001
Performance assessment	10.165	2	0.006
Training	8.839	2	0.012
Security	26.727	2	0.000
Flexible working hours	12.303	2	0.002

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Generation

Looking closer at the results, greater differences are discerned in Baby Boomers and Generation Y in regards to the need for promotion opportunities, with the latter rating it lower (MD =0.50) (table 5). Considering the factor of praise, there are differences among the Baby Boomers and GenXers (MD =0.60), with GenXers rating it higher, as well as between Baby Boomers and GenYers, with the latter rating praise higher (MD = 0.84). Developing personal skills is more important for GenXers than Baby Boomers (MD =0.38) and GenYers (MD =0.27). Moreover, the results indicate that the assessment of performance would motivate GenXers more than GenYers (MD =0.37). Differences in training are noticed between Baby Boomers and GenXers with the first to rate it lower (MD = 0.43). In terms of

security, disparity between the answers of the Baby Boomers and GenXers (MD = 0.77) is found, as well as between the Baby Boomers and GenYers (MD =0.66). Finally, flexible working hours are also rated higher by GenXers and GenYers than Baby Boomers, with mean difference of 0.51 for the Generation X and 0.55 for the Generation Y.

Table 5: Report Mean

	Baby Boomers	GenXers	GenYers	Total
Promotion opportunities	4.12	3.87	3.62	3.86
Praise	2.20	2.80	3.04	2.75
Personal skills	3.47	3.85	3.58	3.75
Performance assessment	3.65	3.70	3.33	3.63
Training	3.14	3.57	3.46	3.48
Security	2.92	3.69	3.58	3.55
Flexible working hours	3.12	3.63	3.67	3.55

5. Discussion

Recent studies (Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2010) recognize the importance of motivation for organizational performance in both the private and the public sector. In the public organization under survey, the highest employee motives are an increase in their salaries, opportunities for advancement in the organization, as well as the development of their personal skills. Moreover, workplace environment is also a top motive. These findings are in line with previous literature (Manolopoulos, 2007; Islam and Zaki Hj. Ismail, 2008; Wiley, 1997) that highlighted a raise in wages and promotion options as important motivating factors. On the other hand, the opportunity to help others, as well as the opportunity to help their country have scored low comparing to others factors, giving the sense that our sample is not highly motivated by intrinsic motives that are often found in public organizations (Wright & Pandey, 2008).

Hierarchical position has an effect on motivation preferences in factors such as praise, additional day off, job rotation, security and flexible working hours; the workforce in higher hierarchical position rate such incentives lower. However, these factors are not associated closely with the PSM construct in which previous research has noted differences (Camilleri, 2007). These variations could yet be explained in combination with generational differences. Indeed, as the older employees in the organization under survey are in higher hierarchical positions, these disparities could be the result of differences among generational groups. Baby Boomers, GenXers and GenYers display differences in promotion opportunities, praise, development of personal skills, performance assessment, training, security and flexible working hours. Results indicate that GenYers place less emphasis on promotion opportunities which is not consistent with literature (Wong et al., 2008). An interpretation of this could be that in public organizations in Greece, Baby Boomers

are obliged to stay longer until their retirement and as result, chances of promotion for the new generations are limited (Benson & Brown, 2011). In terms of praise, younger Generations are motivated more by praise compared to Baby Boomers. This finding is in line with Martin's (2005) review, in which it was noted that Generation Y needs praise and recognition for their job, as well as Bradford and Raines' (1991 as cited in Burke, 1994) paper in which Generation X's need for praise is noted. GenXers have also the highest mean in the factor of skills development, which was expected as this group is characterized by the need to attain skills (Jorgensen, 2003). Moreover, performance appraisal seems to motivate GenXers more than GenYers, which was not presumed as work appraisal and feedback are attributes that characterize Generation Y (Beard et al., 2008; Berk, 2009). Training is another aspect that displays variation between Baby Boomers and Generation X, with the latter scoring higher. Previous literature has stressed the fact that GenXers give greater emphasis on training and skill-development, than foregoing generations (Krug, 1998). In terms of security there are differences between GenXers/GenYers with Baby Boomers; the new generations score higher in security as a motivating factor. Jorgensen (2003) has mentioned that members of Generation X desire security in their work, while previous research (Guillot-Soulez, Soulez, 2014) on Generation Y indicates job security as a preference. Flexible working hours display variance among the three generations in line with earlier studies that note

GenYers and GenXers motivation by flexibility (Kultalahti & Liisa Viitala, 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2003).

Finally, males and females display differences in motives of work environment, praise, training and flexible working hours; females rate each of these factors higher. Anterior studies have indicated that women are motivated more by recognition, (Kamdron, 2005) and they place emphasis on flexible working hours (Scandura & Lankau, 1997).

6. Limitations – Further Research

The aim of this study was to investigate the motivating factors in the public sector in Greece as well as to study demographic attributes, placing emphasis on age and gender as determinants of employee motives. Managers' understanding of the differences in motivational needs of the different generations can help in engendering effectiveness and efficiency. However, since the present research has been conducted on a single public organization, awareness should be raised as far as the generalizability of the results towards useful insights for further exploration.

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