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Published version

DUFFY, Marc and WATTS, Jo (2020). Earning the commitment of millennials, the secret weapon of Corporate Social Responsibility. In: BAM 2020 conference in the cloud proceedings. British Academy of Management.

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Earning the commitment of millennials, the secret weapon of Corporate Social Responsibility

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Track 22: Organisational Studies

British Academy of Management - 2020 Conference

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Summary

The commitment of an employee to their employer has been researched extensively by academics over the last fifty years (Cantril, 1963; Mowday, Steers and Porter, 1979; Allen and Meyer, 1990; Singh, Gupta and Venugopal, 2008; Al-Yami, Galdas and Watson, 2018), the context for such research has generally been contextualised to '*baby boomers*' who represented the workforce during this period. Millennial employees are soon expected to make up 60% of the workforce with the last baby boomers expected to retire this decade (Westerman and Yamamura, 2007). The needs and desires of millennials at work are different to baby boomers with millennials more concerned with organisations impact on the world and commitment to sustainability strategies (Leveson and Joiner, 2014). Organisational Commitment (OC) has also been noted to be in decline, with millennials not seeking or expecting a '*job for life*' (Hammer, 2015). This paper therefore proposes that organisational Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) might be an important tool for organisations wishing to commit millennial employees.

Word Count: 1,989

Introduction

The topic of organisational commitment has been of academic interest and attention for at least fifty years (Cantril, 1963; Mowday, Steers and Porter, 1979; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2000; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001; Al-Yami, Galdas and Watson, 2018). Indeed, Meyer and Allen (2000) have argued that only job satisfaction has received more research attention. Central to commitment theory is the idea that employee commitment will result in a reduction in turnover of employees and for positively committed employees, the employee and employer will share goals and values (Jaros, 1997).

Commitment theorists have dedicated little time and attention to the evolution of commitment and how it might manifest itself over time and between generations. Indeed, the opposite is arguably true of OC theory, assuming that commitment is generally static over time and unchanging (Swales, 2002). This assumption is problematic, particularly where new generations, with their own needs and expectations are increasingly exposed to the workforce. Ozcelik (2015, p. 102) argues that the oldest generation still in the workforce are '*baby boomers*', born between 1946 and 1964. This is problematic to researchers interested in commitment as they represent the context in which much OC theory has been developed. Further, this generation is '*nearing retirement age, if they have not already left.*'

Kelleher (2011) argues that different generations possess distinctive characteristics with respect to their expectations in employment, work orientation and engagement. In particular, this presents a challenge to the central premise of OC because employee turnover rates have increased (Westerman and Yamamura, 2007). This leaves OC theory in an uncertain position, where the demands of a new generation are not fully understood, potentially leading to misunderstanding of employee needs, expectations and potentially leading to lower commitment and higher-turnover.

Given the age of millennials and their recent emergence into the workforce, it is not unsurprising that specific research considering their needs is only now beginning to emerge into the literature (Leveson and Joiner, 2014). The millennial generation have been described as '*high-maintenance but also overachievers*', restless in employment with many barely staying in roles for 18 months and having little sense of calling (Hammer, 2015, p. 22).

In this vein, the Cone study (2008) identified that 61% of millennials feel personally responsible for making a difference in the work and believe that it is their responsibility to make it a better place. Further, 69% of millennials who are employees wish to work for an organisation who care about their employer's contribution to society and 69% say they would refuse to work for an organisation that is not socially responsible. As part of CSR strategy, organisations often (but not exclusively) refer to '*making a difference*' and organisational '*good*' seemingly overlapping, at least in part with millennial desires (Leveson and Joiner, 2014; Farrington *et al.*, 2017).

Therefore, this leads the researcher to question the relationship between commitment of millennials and organisations CSR strategies, if commitment is an overlap between goals and values, and millennials value CSR and general organisational responsibility, then perhaps CSR can be used as a tool to attract and commit millennial employees to organisations.

Research Question

How do millennials respond to organisational corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies and do these strategies influence their overall commitment?

Research Objectives

- To investigate the relationship between CSR and millennials
- To determine the relationship between CSR and OC within the context of millennials
- To establish if OC is positively associated with OC from the perspective of millennials

Literature Review

The literature relative to millennials, organisational commitment and corporate social responsibility will be explored.

Organisational Commitment

The subject of OC has been of academic interest for at least fifty years (Cantril, 1941; Tolman, 1943; Mowday, et al., 1979; Meyer, et al., 1993; Singh, et al., 2015) Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) define commitment as fulfilling three primary criteria;

1. a strong belief in the organisations goals and values;
2. a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation;
3. a strong desire to maintain membership in the organisation

Meyer & Allen (1991) built upon this foundation by developing the well cited 'Three Component Model' (TCM). Featuring Affirmative Commitment (AC), the desire to stay, originally developed by Porter and Steers (1974) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). Secondly, Continuance Commitment, (CC) is defined as needing to stay, a development of Becker's (1960) side bet theory, where an the employee is constantly evaluating their investments within their organisation and calculating the costs associated with leaving. Thirdly, Normative Commitment (NC), is the obligation to stay in line with Wiener's (1982) normative theory and the feeling of loyalty, arguably through earlier periods of support from the organisation. However, several studies have noted a lack of primary data to support the concept of NC (Jaros, 1997; Ko, Price and Mueller, 1997; Meyer and Parfyonova, 2010).

The concept of NC and loyalty is perhaps relevant in this context where a lack of commitment is expected, trapped based commitment (CC) is expected to be less prevalent for millennials who are more willing to change jobs. Finally, affective commitment, where OC is developed through shared goals and values, is expected to be the most prevalent to this investigation.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Researchers are yet to agree upon a common definition of CSR (Zabid *et al.*, 2003; Alozn, Al Naimi and Asad, 2014; Attia, Duquenne and Le-Lann, 2014; Rogers and Ashforth, 2017). The WCED (1987) define sustainability as '*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*'. The United Nations (2020) have developed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to assist relevant stakeholders attention and focus relative to implementing sustainability strategies and despite

the ongoing efforts to implement the SDGs (Gray, 1994), there have been critics of the goals, arguing that they are excessively expensive and a glorified form of *'aid'* (Economist, 2015).

The business case for adopting CSR strategies is becoming increasingly apparent with several scholars arguing a link between financial, environmental and social performance (i.e. the triple bottom line, TBL). However, the implementation of sustainability strategies is a challenge for organisations. Farrington (2017, p. 33) argues that it is *'neither practical nor logical'* for all organisations to engage in identical CSR strategies owing to the *'diverse nature of organisations and [varying] motivations of staff'* and perhaps this is a contributing factor for organisations who wish to implement CSR strategies. In particular, here, the context of staff needs and motivations.

Farrington (2017) argues that relatively little is known about the process, in which stakeholders might engage with the design and implementation of CSR strategies, and perhaps this is owing to the nature of CSR. CSR is a voluntary initiative that is largely self-reported by organisations (Tajbakhsh and Hassini, 2015). Organisations have been accused of only reporting positive attributes of their practice and emitting harmful information as would be allowed under a voluntary initiative leading to claims that they are *'greenwashing'* (Visser, 2011). The impact upon such activities vis a vis millennials is unknown and of relevance to this paper.

Millennials

Westerman and Yamamura (2007) argue that differences between generations in the workforce can be a significant source of conflict in organisations, with much of the conflict arising between *'generational differences.'* Millennials have been defined as being born in the mid-1980s and entering the labour market at a time of increased sensitivity and scrutiny of the CSR activities of organisations (Leveson and Joiner, 2014). The millennial generation have different expectations of their employment experience, in regards to learning, attitudes to career, self-development, work orientation and engagement (Ozcelik, 2015).

The millennial generation are said to be strongly influenced by their childhood, including the experience of seeing recurrent layoffs of their parents and the development of career paths for two working parents. This is in contrast to 'baby boomers' (born between 1946 and 1964) who are most often associated with a job for life, job security, optimism and team orientation. Further, baby boomers have an ingrained belief that their needs will always be met, in contrast to millennials who see themselves as responsible for their own needs (Westerman and Yamamura, 2007).

These generational differences are also observed in work values and the commitment of millennials to sustainability and responsibility (Cone, 2008; Leveson and Joiner, 2014). These arguments and needs of the new generation are important owing to the generational shift that is currently occurring in employment. Indeed, it is argued that in the United States, Generation X and Y make up 45% of today's workforce and workers under the age of 34 will soon make up 60% of the workforce (Westerman and Yamamura, 2007).

Summary

The literature review has investigated the emerging needs of the millennial generation and the emerging need for organisations to commit to CSR strategies to appease stakeholders. Further, the reduction in OC was also noted, in part due to the emerging style of worker in the

modern workforce. The author proposes that CSR strategies may serve to partly meet the needs of millennials and serve as a tool to earn commitment from this group of employees.

Research Design and Methodology

The proposal for the collection of data to answer the research question is ongoing and the researcher is open to suggestions as to how this might be improved. In order to best investigate this emerging area, the researcher proposes a quantitative questionnaire that builds upon existing tools in the OC tradition. The intention of this initial study is to open avenues for further investigation, perhaps qualitative and exploratory in nature.

In order to investigate the desires of millennials at work and investigate their needs relative to employment, the researcher proposes a case study approach within a single defined context. Yin (2003) describes the benefits of a case study approach as being suited to projects with a 'how' and 'why' question in a real context. The possibility to generalise to a population in single cases is unknown because it is impossible to discern if a single case can be representative in multiple contexts (Bryman, 2016), however Herriot and Firestone (1983) argue that evidence from single cases is often considered to be more compelling and robust. The context for the case is proposed to be Sheffield Hallam University and student's enrolled on the Business Studies course. In total, around 340 students are enrolled onto the course.

The researcher proposes to issue an adapted version of the Meyer and Allen (1990) Three Component Model (TCM) questionnaire designed to identify the commitment levels and profiles. The TCM measures affective, continuance and normative commitment using a six-point scale with six questions representing each component of the model. Examples of the TCM questions include;

TCM Element	Question
Affective Commitment	<i>I would be happy to spent the rest of my career with [this organisation]</i>
Continuance Commitment	<i>Right now, staying with [my organisation] is a matter of necessity as much as desire</i>
Normative Commitment	<i>Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave [my organisation] now</i>

In order to address the sustainability angle of the project, and the relationship between OC and CSR, the researcher proposes a scale in the same tradition to measure commitment to CSR. In order to assess the reliability of the scale, the researcher intends to measure the internal reliability of all scales (Alpha test) to ensure that it remains above the desired consistency (Field, 2018). The reliability of the scales in seminal TCM scale are .87, .75 and .79 for the AC, CC and NC scales respectively. The researcher will seek data that is in line with the seminal work (Allen and Meyer, 1990).

Examples of questions that will be included in this scale relating to CSR will include;

Corporate Social Responsibility Element	CSR Questions
	<i>It is important to me that my employer takes responsibility for their actions</i>
	<i>I would select an employer based on their commitment to the environment</i>
	<i>I would select an employer based on their commitment to their employees</i>

I would select an employer based on their commitment to profitability

Once the data is collected, the researcher envisions that he will be able to seek correlations in the data to test the relationship between CSR and the three components of OC; AC, CC and NC.

The researcher is open to widening the study to include a qualitative element; this could be achieved by including a statement on the questionnaire to determine if the participants would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview, post-questionnaire and to deepen the researchers understanding of the overall commitment and CSR relationship.

What's next

- Complete the methodology and data collection methods
- Establish the data analysis protocol
- Complete data collection with the proposed sample
- Convert this paper to a 'full paper' for the 2021 conference

Conclusion

In summary, the author has proposed a relationship between two different areas of academic interest owing to their joint overlap in the '*goals and values.*' It is expected that the outcome of the overall project will be incremental in nature and practically useful for practitioners in line with Corley and Gioia's (2011) theoretical contribution model.

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