

An Exploration of Factors Predicting Work Alienation of Knowledge Workers

Nisha Nair

Neharika Vohra (presenting author)

Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad



Background of the Research

- Workforce today increasingly comprised of knowledge workers (KWs) (Davenport et al., 2002; Yigitcanlar et al., 2007)
 - Organizations cannot risk alienating KWs (Davenport et al., 2002)
- Alienation not received much attention in organizational studies (Kohn, 1976)
 - Traditionally studied with respect to manual workers
 - Most of the work in 1960's and 70's
 - Variables studied in isolation → comprehensive model explaining work alienation missing
 - Research not contextualized for KWs

About the Study

□ **Research Objective**

- To examine the extent and reasons for KWs alienation from work

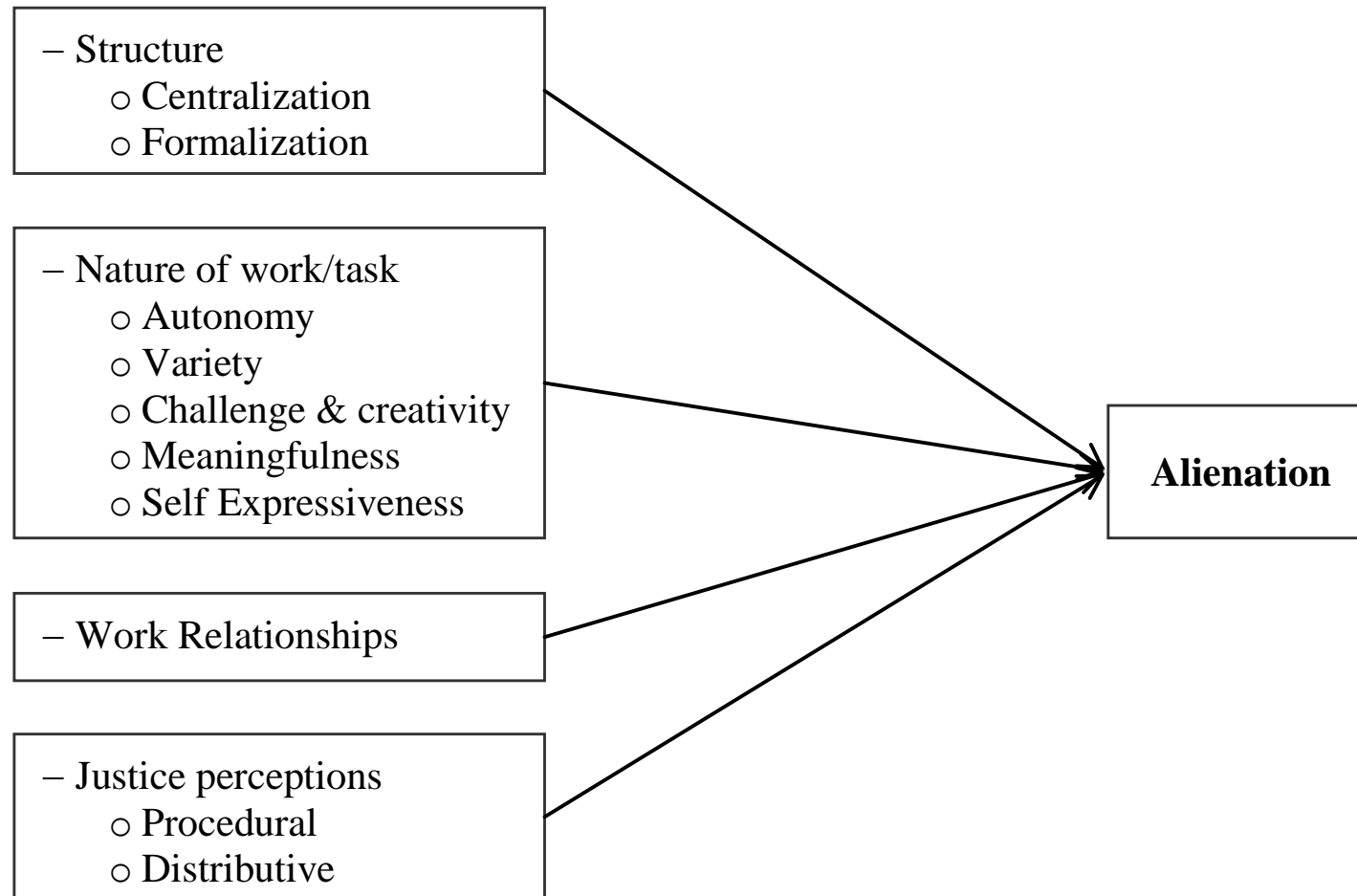
□ **Methodology**

- Questionnaire data based on survey design
- Self report

□ **Sampling**

- Data collected from 1142 KWs across 6 large, medium and small organizations in the IT industry in India
- Minimum 1 year work experience

Model with Predictors of Alienation for KWs



Operational Definitions of the Measures used

Variable	Working Definition
Alienation	Estrangement or disconnect from work, the context or the self
Centralization	Hierarchy of authority and participation in decision making
Formalization	Degree of job codification, rule observation and job specificity
Autonomy	Degree of freedom/flexibility on the job
Variety	Extent to which there is variety with respect to nature of work
Creativity and Challenge	Extent to which work offers stimulation and opportunity to innovate
Meaningfulness	Whether work is perceived as meaningful or not
Self Expression	Ability to work or allow for self expression
Work Relationships	Quality of work relations with respect to superiors, subordinates, and peers
Justice	Fairness in processes and fairness is distribution of rewards or outcomes

Measures used in the study

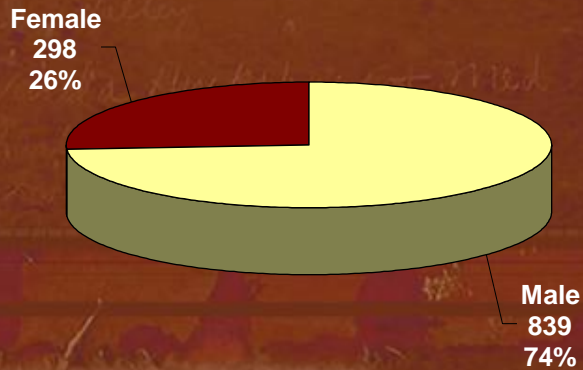
Variable	Measure Used	No. Of Items	Reliability
Centralization	Hierarchy of Authority (Aiken & Hage, 1967)	5	.833
Formalization	Job Codification & Rule Observation (Aiken & Hage, 1967)	8	.684
Autonomy	Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1975)	3	0.645
Variety	Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1975)	3	0.688
Creativity & Challenge	KEYS Scale (Amabile et al., 1996)	4	0.873
Meaningfulness	Developed for this study	3	0.752
Self Expression	Developed for this study	2	0.757
Work Relationships	Developed for this study	3	0.713
Justice	Procedural & Distributive Justice (Colquitt, 2001)	13	.932 & .970
Alienation	Developed for this study	9	0.828

Sample Characteristics

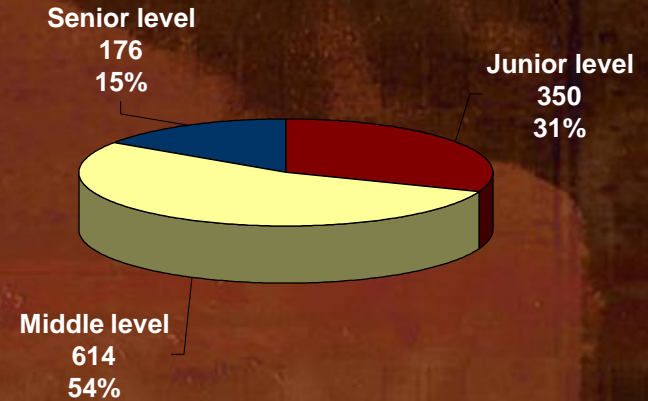
- Majority (74%) were male
- Mean age was 29.2, mode 24 and range between 20 & 63 years
- Work experience ranging from 1 year to 41 years; mean 6.2 years
- Education- graduates (67%); 32% masters and 1% doctorate
- Job level- middle level (54%), junior level (31%) and senior level (15%)
- Income level- less than Rs. 5 lakh/annum (52%), Rs. 5-10 lakh/annum (30%), Rs. 10-15 lakh/annum (11%), and Rs. 15-20 lakh/annum (4%), < Rs. 20 lakh/annum (3%)

Data Profile

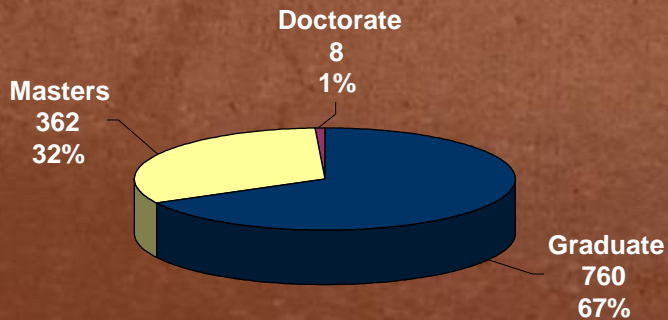
Respondent Profile by Gender



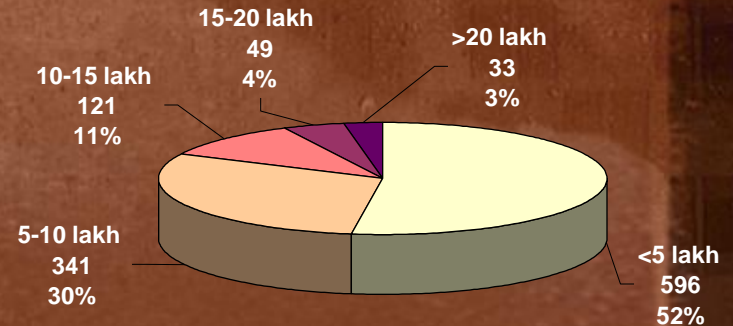
Respondent Profile by Job Level



Respondent Profile by Educational Level



Respondent Profile by Income Level



Descriptive Statistics

Measure	Mean	Std. Deviation
Autonomy	4.97	1.24
Variety	4.70	1.35
Creativity & Challenge	4.70	1.41
Meaningfulness	4.93	1.36
Self Expressiveness	4.67	1.52
Work Relationships	5.56	1.20
Work Centrality	50.05	18.32
Centralization	3.77	1.43
Formalization	4.43	0.95
Expectancy Disconfirmation	2.49	0.68
Alienation	2.76	1.48
Justice (Procedural)	4.34	1.35
Justice (Distributive)	4.21	1.73

N = 1142

Results

- Work alienation on the average was low (average alienation score greater than 4 on a scale of 1 to 7), however -

227 out of 1142 → Alienated (19.8%)

- Main effects for predictors of work alienation tested using structural equation modeling

Results (Cont..)

SEM Model Fit Summary

χ^2/df	AGFI	PGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI	PNFI	RMSEA
3.123	0.878	0.772	0.916	0.935	0.941	0.826	0.043
>3.00	<0.85	<0.50	<0.90	<0.90	<0.90	<0.50	>0.05

Path Coefficients from SEM Analysis

			Estimate	p value
Alienation	<---	Work Relationships	-0.153	0.002
Alienation	<---	Justice (Procedural)	-0.045	0.238
Alienation	<---	Justice (Distributive)	-0.001	0.966
Alienation	<---	Self Expressiveness	-0.338	0.007
Alienation	<---	Meaningfulness	-0.388	0.000
Alienation	<---	Creativity & Challenge	-0.176	0.392
Alienation	<---	Variety	0.102	0.568
Alienation	<---	Autonomy	0.098	0.258
Alienation	<---	Formalization	-0.036	0.416
Alienation	<---	Centralization	0.054	0.263

Summary

- Good model fit
 - Explained variance → 61.5 %
- Significant predictors of work alienation for KWs
 - Low Meaningfulness in work
 - Low Self Expressiveness in work
 - Poor Work Relationships

Implications for Practice

- ❑ Cannot ignore alienation among KWs
 - 1 in 5 KW likely to be alienated!
- ❑ Design work that is more meaningful and allows KWs to express themselves through their work
 - Beyond traditional focus on variety, autonomy etc.
- ❑ Invest in building congenial work relationships in the workplace

Limitations & Future Research

□ Limitations

- Self report → common source variance
- KWs from one type of knowledge industry
- Limited data on highest educational and very high income levels

□ Future Research

- Expand the study to other knowledge industries and cultural contexts
- Exploration of consequences of alienation
- In depth qualitative study of alienation
- Longitudinal research of those alienated