

Expectations and Experiences of Young Employees: The Case of German Nonprofits



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Research Question

Why do young people choose to work for free welfare associations?

Brief Abstract

The free welfare associations (FWAs) are the main providers of social services and healthcare in Germany, accounting for nearly 80% of the entire workforce in the social service nonprofit sector. This paper explores why individuals pursue careers in this sector and analyzes their expectations, work experiences, and job satisfaction. Overall, the results revealed that individuals choose to enter this line of work because it aligns with their personal values and life experiences; however, often their expectations do not match the reality of the workplace, leading to job dissatisfaction. Given that nonprofits rely heavily on their employees, and employee performance depends on job satisfaction, employers must consider ways to bridge this gap.

Key Findings

- ▶ Although most employees are intrinsically motivated to work in nonprofits, low pay was only acceptable as long as their personal situation allowed for it.
- ▶ Entry-level employees in FWAs tended to pursue career-enhancing moves by frequently changing employers.
- ▶ Young employees often experienced differences between their initial expectations and the actual work environment, especially as it relates to the economic and work environment of FWAs.

Opportunities for Action

- ▶ Organizations should provide counseling upon recruitment to address the working realities of nonprofit work, and older employees should receive financial planning counseling given that salaries may not increase as quickly as employee needs.
- ▶ Nonprofits should offer professional development opportunities to enhance employee job satisfaction.
- ▶ Implementing intermediary positions between entry-level and upper management roles might improve retention of qualified employees while offering clear possibilities for career advancement.

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Expectations and Experiences of Young Employees: The Case of German Nonprofits

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Nonprofits rely heavily on their employees, and employee performance depends on job satisfaction. Using qualitative research methods, this article examines employee expectations, work experiences, and job satisfaction in German nonprofits. Expectations do not match the workplace reality, and this gap leads to job dissatisfaction. Ways to ameliorate this are discussed.

Keywords: Germany, job satisfaction, nonprofits, work expectations, work experience

INTRODUCTION

Employees are the most important intangible assets in nonprofit organizations (Rodwell & Teo, 2008). Their work experiences and job satisfaction are major influencing factors of organizational performance, which is especially true for labor-intensive social service and health care providers (Akingbola, 2006). Increasing economic pressure, however, forces nonprofits to implement drastic organizational changes to be able to compete in a diverse market of social services and health care (Murray, 2010). Those changes often negatively affect their employees.

The free welfare associations (FWAs), which are the main providers of social services and health care in Germany (Zimmer & Toepler, 2000), have undergone significant changes in the last decade. They account for nearly 80% (1.5 million employees) of the entire workforce in the social service nonprofit sector (Zimmer et al., 2004) and are organized in six centralized umbrella organizations: Caritas, Diakonie and the Jewish Welfare Services (religiously affiliated), Worker's Welfare (politically affiliated), German Red Cross (affiliated with the Red Cross International), and the Parity (non-affiliated). Typical services provided by FWAs include day care centers, child welfare services, health services, unemployment consulting, assistance to immigrants, and elderly care.

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Until the 1990s, FWAs were completely reliant on government funding and enjoyed a quasi-monopoly in the provision of social services. They received preference in funding over other nonprofit, public, or for-profit providers when contracting for social services (Zimmer et al., 2004). However, in past decades FWAs have experienced governmental cutbacks. To meet social welfare needs at lower costs, the government opened up the provision of social services and health care to competition from other providers, thereby eliminating the quasi-monopoly enjoyed by the FWAs (Zimmer et al., 2004).

As a consequence, FWAs implemented management processes and internal controls that have had significant impacts on working conditions and labor agreements (Zimmer & Toepler 2000). All areas of human resource management (HRM) were negatively affected, including recruitment, job assignments, professional development, retention, and administration (Vilain, 2002). For instance, new collective agreements allowing FWAs more flexibility in setting wages conflicted with existing practices and expectations among employees (Dahme, Trube, & Wohlfahrt, 2007). While there is considerable literature documenting the organizational changes in FWAs and their effects in the last decades (Zimmer & Toepler, 2000; Grunwald, 2001; Zimmer & Hallmann, 2002; Lange & Hunger, 2003; Zimmer, et al., 2004; Dahme, et. al, 2007), little attention has been paid to the impact of these changes on employees in relation to job satisfaction (Vilain, 2002).

Young employees often start their work in nonprofit organizations with high expectations, and the congruence of expectations with the actual work situation positively influences job satisfaction (Bal et. al, 2008; De Vos, Buyens, & Schalk, 2003). With changes in working conditions and collective agreements in FWAs, this paper examines the congruence, or lack thereof, in work expectations and experiences of employees recruited to entry-level positions in FWAs. This paper provides an exploratory analysis into the reasons why young people take on careers in FWAs, as well as their expectations, work experiences, and job satisfaction. The main research questions are: Why do young people choose to work in FWAs? Is there an alignment between their expectations and their actual work experiences? Are they satisfied with their work environment?

JOB SATISFACTION IN NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

The concept of job satisfaction indicates the extent to which employees are pleased with their work and provides a personal evaluation of whether the job fulfills one's needs and values (Locke, 1976). High levels of job satisfaction among nonprofit employees lead to greater organizational performance (Akingbola, 2006; Tortia, 2008), whereas job dissatisfaction is the single most reliable predictor of employee turnover, which negatively affects organizational performance (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007; Tortia, 2008). Besides the work itself, one of the most salient factors influencing job satisfaction for employees is their work environment, which encompasses relations with co-workers, supervisors, and clients (Ewald, 1997; Borzaga & Depedri, 2005; Ducharme, Knudsen, & Roman, 2008); professional development possibilities (Borgaza & Tortia, 2006); compensation and appropriateness of wages (Glisson & Durick, 1988); wage equity (Leete, 2000); workload (Cole, Panchanadeswaran, & Daining, 2004); and perceived fairness in terms of distributive and procedural justice (Lambert et. al, 2005; Tortia, 2008).

For FWAs, Vilain (2002) finds that poor working conditions impact the level of job satisfaction of the workforce, and this has significant negative effects on individual performance, which leads to a decrease in organizational performance. Furthermore, scholars have found that nonprofit employees derive a large part of their satisfaction from identifying with the mission of the organization they choose to work for. This identification is referred to as mission attachment (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003; Benz, 2005; Handy, Mook, Ginieniewicz, & Quarter, 2007). Dissatisfaction with pay and career advancement may dilute their mission attachment, leading to turnover intentions (Kim & Lee, 2007). Geurts and colleagues (1999) found that employees with unmet job expectations report

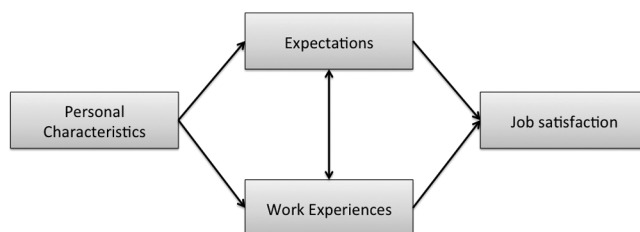


FIGURE 1 Conceptual framework.

sick more often and are likely to quit. Similar studies in the nonprofit context present comparable findings (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001; Strolin-Goltzman et al, 2008).

Job satisfaction is particularly important for nonprofits, as they are not able to use the extrinsic rewards systems available in for-profit firms (Preston, 1989; Handy & Katz, 1998; Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007). Nonprofits rely on other means of motivating and rewarding their workforce. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the personal characteristics of employees, their work expectations and experiences, and their subsequent levels of job satisfaction. It serves as a conceptual framework for the paper and is explained in the following sections.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Nonprofit employees are described as highly motivated, value-driven, and attracted by the organizational mission and public good characteristics of their work (Benz, 2005), and are therefore more likely to accept lower pay (Light, 2004; Brown & Yoshioka, 2003; Handy et al., 2007). The organization's values and goals are important (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003; Theuvsen, 2004), and achieving these goals is a prime motivator for employees (Cheverton, 2007). Their perception of their work depends on their personal values and motivations, as well as their expectations (George & Jones, 1997). Expectations are defined as the preconceived notions employees have regarding their specific roles, responsibilities, and tasks in the context of the work as well as the nature of the work environment (Major, Kozlowski, Chao, & Gardner, 1995). The congruence of their expectations with the actuality of their work is critical and associated with job satisfaction (Akingbola, 2006; Amos & Weathington, 2008). This is reflected in their commitment to the organization and related to retention (Major et al., 1995; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007). The relationship between personal characteristics of young adults, their expectations, and their work experience is dynamic. Younger people have the increased tendency to enter the workforce with high expectations, but over time adapt their expectations according to their workplace reality (Bal, et al., 2008; De Vos et al., 2003). Moreover, not only do personal characteristics influence how one experiences the work situation, but working in an organization may also lead to changes in expectations (Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2003). Roberts and colleagues (2003) assume that young individuals "change their behavior as they learn the norms associated with their work roles" (p. 582).

Younger nonprofit employees particularly value challenging and interesting work (Light, 2002), but also are more likely to report lower levels of job satisfaction (Borzaga & Depedri, 2005), lower personal accomplishment, more psychological strain, and more depersonalization than older employees (Schwartz, Tiamiyu, & Dwyer, 2007). Younger employees are also described as being less psychologically resilient, having lower levels of job mastery (Schwartz et al., 2007), and possessing the tendency to be less visionary, competent, and committed as compared to older nonprofit employees (Kunreuther, 2003).

Young employees are more likely to leave nonprofit work than older employees. This might be due to the organizational setting, as Oliva and colleagues (1991) point out that FWAs have difficulty in retaining a young workforce due to inflexible working hours, low wages, and the low image of nonprofit work in the German society. Borzaga and Depedri (2005) find that relational aspects of nonprofit work were more important for younger employees, who were more likely to leave if they found their relationships within the workplace to be unsatisfactory. Younger employees pursue the “boundaryless career” (Haley-Lock, 2008, p. 147), with frequent changes of employers as a means of achieving faster career advancement while gaining greater and more varied experiences. In addition, they have fewer financial and family obligations and hence can afford to be intolerant of poor working conditions. Nonprofit employees seem to put less emphasis on the traditional organizational career path of staying within one organization throughout their entire professional life (Haley-Lock, 2008).

Thus among the many reasons that younger nonprofit employees may quit their work, the one salient reason is the disconnect that arises when their actual experiences on the job do not align with the expectations that young employees bring with them to the workplace (see Figure 1). It is unclear, however, what exactly contributes to this process. Furthermore, this literature is largely based in the United States, and much less is known about nonprofit employees in other contexts. This study addresses this gap and examines the reasons for job dissatisfaction of young nonprofit employees in Germany and focuses on their initial expectations and subsequent work experiences.

METHODS

Data Collection

This study uses a pragmatic qualitative approach that utilizes ethnographic techniques to study the research questions (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 1990). The sample was purposive in nature while using snowball-sampling techniques (Bryman, 2008). First, professional social workers and human resource managers employed by FWAs in Lower Saxony were solicited to provide names of entry-level employees working in FWAs. Interviewees of the first round were asked to facilitate contact with former fellow students and colleagues. This process was continued until saturation of information in data was reached (Morse, 1995).

Twenty-eight interviews were conducted in German by telephone (25) and face-to-face (3). Interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and interviews lasted an average of 26 minutes. Following a semi-structured open-ended interview guide, they were asked questions related to their current job and contract characteristics, their motivations in choosing nonprofit employment, their expectations prior to selecting their job, their current level of job satisfaction and their evaluation of their work environment, as well as some socio-demographic questions. Interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed. The research team worked collaboratively in translating transcripts and analyzing data using qualitative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990).

Data Analysis

In the first step of the analysis, while utilizing analytic induction and constant comparison strategies, common themes regarding values, work experiences, job satisfaction, and expectations toward nonprofit work were detected in the transcripts. These themes were identified by going back and forth between the interview transcripts and the emerging theoretical understandings. After coding these themes, the interviews were examined for instances of the same or similar phenomena. This process was repeated until all findings were coded. Members of the research team worked sequentially and then collaboratively to maintain the credibility criteria of the study. With these codes, the research questions were addressed.

TABLE 1
Characteristics of the Interviewees

<i>Professional background</i>	<i>Social work</i>	<i>Business management/ linguistics*</i>	<i>Health care/political sciences**</i>	<i>Theology/social economics/social sciences/education***</i>
No. of respondents	14	6	4	4
FWA affiliation	Caritas	Diakonie	The Parity	Red Cross/Workers Welfare/Jewish Welfare***
No. of respondents	10	5	10	3
Federal State	Lower Saxony	Baden-Wüberg	Northrhine-Westfalia	Hesse/Berlin/Rhineland-Pfalz***
No. of respondents	17	6	2	3
Type of FWA (only front-line employees)	Youth association	Stationary youth welfare services	Ambulatory youth welfare service/integration and migration assistance*	Elderly care/disability support services***
No. of respondents	5	2	6	2
Contract Characteristics	Full-time	Part-time	Open-ended	Temporary
No. of respondents	21	7	16	12

Note: *Three interviewees each; **two each; ***one each, respectively.

Sample Characteristics

All 28 interviewees hold professional degrees and are in entry-level positions in FWAs and work in 26 different FWAs spread across seven federal states of Germany. The majority of the interviewees were women (60%) with an average age of 29 years and an average length of employment of 2.5 years. Fifteen were front-line service employees, whereas 13 worked in management such as human resources and finance, or administrative positions such as fundraising, marketing, and public relations. This sample reflects the nature of the workforce of FWAs in Germany, which is largely composed of social or welfare workers (Burmester 2005). Table 1 summarizes characteristics of the interviewees.

FINDINGS

The analysis uncovered three primary categories: decision to choose nonprofit work in FWAs, the expectations of and experiences while working, and job dissatisfaction. In each category several themes arose.

In the first category, the decision to choose nonprofit work, the interviewees reflected on their career choices toward nonprofit work along their personal values, individual motivations, and life experiences. Under the theme of personal values, the data suggest that the decision to work in the nonprofit sector is highly influenced by individuals' personal values, with the most prevalent values being ideological, altruistic, and religious. One employee explains: "I consciously chose the Red Cross; it suits me and complies with my personal values" (G21, 48-53). For another, the "doing good" motive was important: "I believe it is inherent in me . . . I just want to do beneficial work with people and help them" (G4, 36-37).

Employees working in religious FWAs emphasized their faith as motivating their choice of employment. They expected to find their religious values and beliefs to be reflected in religious

FWAs. One employee said, “First, I knew I wanted to work with children and experience doing something worthwhile. Secondly, it is my Christian attitude. I knew I wanted to work for the church and the church-related nonprofits” (G13, 64-68). Interestingly, the opposite is also true. One social worker at a non-religious FWA explicitly stated that she selected organizations that were not religious, as she did not have religious values. Although she had the required baptismal record and active membership in the church associated with the FWA necessary for employment, she thought it was essential “not to pretend to have religious beliefs in order to get employment, but to remain honest to my own values” (G24, 114). However, she keeps her church membership in order “not to decrease her chances for future employment” (G24, 116). These quotes are typical of our findings that suggest the importance of secular and non-secular values in selecting initial jobs.

The second theme suggests that interviewees are primarily intrinsically motivated in their decision to work for FWAs. Money played a minor role for many young employees when they were searching for a job after graduation. As work occupies a large part of their day, employees articulated that work should endow their life with meaning. As an employee in marketing explains: “I am not willing to say—I am just going to work to make money and that I don’t really care what I do—I need to see that I accomplish something and it benefits more than just me, and that others also benefit” (G6, 88). Another said, “The type of work I do is more important to me; the money is really less important” (G15, 155-157).

The third theme that emerged was previous experiences, which played an important influence role in determining sector choice. Some emphasized the influence of having had a family member or close relative working in the nonprofit sector, as this quote suggests: “During my school days I lived with my family [who worked for local NGOs] in Africa, Rwanda, and Cameroon. That was before my professional life, but it played a major role in my career choice” (G19, 4-6). Six employees noted their previous volunteering experiences in nonprofits as influencing their career choices (G4, G10, G13, G17, G24, G28). One social worker reported, “I was active in youth work as a volunteer since I was 14 years old. It was clear that this was an interesting field of work for me” (G24, 130-132). Two male interviewees indicated that their community service experience was crucial in their vocational choice, as this quote indicates: “It all started with my community service. I’ve found that social work lies in my personality. I easily empathize with the situation of others” (G23, 35-37).

Personal values, motivations, and various life experiences are identified as factors that influence job choice among young nonprofit employees in this study. These themes emerged in most of the interviews, suggesting that individual values are instrumental in understanding the type of person who engages in nonprofit work. Many were clear on their non-monetary motivations for their choice, while previous experiences provided many with a taste of working with nonprofits.

Expectations and experiences of employees was the second category that emerged. It includes four themes with some sub-themes: relationships with coworkers, working conditions (working hours and workload), compensation levels, and opportunities for growth.

Relationships with coworkers were an important theme. FWA employees wished for meaningful relationships with colleagues. The interviewees assumed that FWA employees would share a certain philosophy in life; future colleagues were expected to be like-minded with similar values. One interviewee noted, “I expected that one would work with a certain kind of people who sees life just a little bit differently” (G9, 48-49). Interestingly, those interviewees who highly valued religious aspects expected to find colleagues who share the same set of values and who show support and courtesy intrinsic in those who were religiously driven and possess a “critical Catholic attitude” (G10, 138) toward work in FWAs. The attitude of finding likeminded coworkers was consistent throughout the interviews, even though the sample consisted of various professions. For example, one employee with a degree in business management said, “I expected that the staff had a particular philosophy, that they put their heart and soul in their work, and were also firm believers in the mission of their work. I was hoping they work because they enjoy it. These were my expectations

[. . .] employees in nonprofits work with similar convictions, they can easily collaborate or work together in teams” (G23, 65-77).

The quality of the relationships in the work setting was important for the employees, as this employee explained: “Sometimes I have the feeling . . . you spend more time with your colleagues, than with your friends. Friends you choose, but colleagues you don’t. I believe sometimes it is not so terribly important what you do, but where you are and you have to feel comfortable. The working atmosphere with colleagues has to feel comfortable and fit” (G3, 177-182). Many worked collectively with their colleagues toward reaching the organizational goal; even if there were problems, their collegiality and shared goals allowed them to work these problems out. One young woman explained, “I work very closely together with a colleague; on a personal level, the collaboration is very good, but not on the content level. She is not the most appropriate staff member in this area, which leads to errors on her part. Due to the fact that we are on good terms with each other, we talk and try to do better” (G22, 183-188). However, some of the interviewees expressed negative opinions about their coworkers. Their experiences with them were contrary to their initial expectations, as this business management graduate explained, “The idea that the employees are working selflessly for the welfare of children is not a given here. Everybody looks after himself first—that was most disappointing” (G23, 85-87). Expectations of positive relationships at work as well as shared values influence employees’ perception of the working climate in FWAs. Depending on the context, expectations were either met or unmet, leading to positive or negative effects on employees.

Working conditions were the second theme that emerged. While interviewees expected their work to be meaningful, they also expressed the desire to have fun doing it. One woman working in youth welfare services described this well: “So while I need meaning in the work and it is more important to me than the money I earn, I expect it to be enjoyable because you spend far too much time at work” (G5, 101-104). Most often the employees were hoping for working conditions that would enable them some freedom to realize their full potential. One fundraiser noted, “I expected that I can be creative and that I do have a certain amount of freedom, that I am not bound by rigid rules. Such an environment was important for me” (G14, 98-103). Seven of the interviewees concurred that they expected to find a wide variety of tasks within their FWA, and while the nature of the tasks had to be meaningful, they want the variety: “My expectations of the job were that I wanted to have many interesting, meaningful, and challenging tasks. Therefore working for FWAs is an obvious choice because you find a variety of areas to work in. That was actually my main interest in a job after graduation” (G8, 71-74). However, those expectations only partly aligned with the reality in FWAs as we see in the subthemes that emerged related to working hours; high workloads and work outcomes often restricted freedom and creativity. Despite the variety of tasks in welfare work, young employees often did many administrative and repetitive tasks.

Interviewee evaluations of working hours varied according to the jobs that the respondents hold. Some interviewees, mostly those that worked part-time, regarded their working hours as highly flexible, and were thus satisfied. Employees in full-time positions were less likely to be satisfied with working hours, and experienced their working hours to be inflexible. With fixed allotted times for lunch breaks, employees found that their work, which often requires spontaneous action, was not appropriately structured. In addition, full-time employees who worked with volunteers reported a high number of evening working hours. Although such hours are stated as part of their jobs and were initially acceptable, late working hours became difficult over time when young employees faced conflicts with their family responsibilities. When they advocated for a more family-friendly work schedule, they were unsuccessful. A young father of two children reported, “Because of the structure of my organization and its use of volunteers, I am often very dependent on them. They do not care if you have four evening events per week and an upcoming work weekend too. This makes my hours very, very difficult, especially as I have a family. Often I’m frustrated, I do live with and for my work, but it has to be appropriate. I certainly do not count every hour, but it is unfair” (G2, 128-136).

A related sub-theme on increased administrative workloads arose from the implementation of new systems of management and funding following the financial cutbacks to FWAs by the government (Dahme et al., 2007). Employees had to integrate new tasks into their existing workload, which meant working overtime and limiting previous activities. As one female social worker explains, “It happens to me very often that I receive a lot of telephone calls and do not have the time to work on the various things that come in over the phone and then when it’s the end of the work day, I put the receiver to the side and I have to do some of those things urgently. So I do overwork several times a week” (G24, 213-216). Overall workloads were perceived as becoming untenable as she continued: “The work schedule is very tight; one is constantly under very high pressure. You always have many things incredibly fast and much depends on that—it burns you out” (G24, 188-191).

Compensation, the next sub-theme that arose, is lower in nonprofits as compared to for-profits, and usually nonprofit employees are generally aware of this: “You know before you start studying social work that you won’t get the same salary as other jobs” (G4, 20-23), said one social worker in a sentiment echoed by other interviewees as well. However, most interviewees admitted that they had little idea of how much money they would need to sustain their lives. One female employee working in disability support services said, “At the beginning of the [social work] program, when I had already chosen my profession, at that time money, honestly, did not play an important role. Back then, I had no idea what one earns and what one needs” (G1, 69-74). Young employees, thinking about their future, especially related to planning a family, were concerned that current salaries would not be able to provide them with the means to support a future family. As one interviewee said, “I do not want to drag myself with a salary of 1000 Euros my whole life, I’m not entirely altruistic. [. . .] Nonprofit work is definitely a pleasure; it attracts me, you can make a difference. [. . .] However, I don’t have children yet. I am going to turn 30 soon. [. . .] Of course, if my husband did not have a pretty well paid job, it would be very, very difficult. If I ever had children in the near future then the concern is relevant and I think justified” (G9, 89-106).

Thus while most interviewees stated their willingness to work for the good cause, a low pay was only acceptable initially or as long as their personal situation allowed. At the same time some indicated that pay was too low considering their levels of responsibility, the importance of their work, educational requirement, and the amount of stress they face in their jobs. One woman working in public relations noted, “Everyone has too much work and gets too little money for what has to be achieved. I can see that by myself like other colleagues. Many sacrifices are being done while working here with a conviction of doing good” (G19, 99-102).

Those feelings were exacerbated when interviewees compared themselves with people working in other professions that have similar amounts of responsibilities and pressures. Levels of compensation then were considered to be unfair and influenced employees’ attitude, as this quote suggests: “It is an absurdly small salary [. . .] and this utterly unmotivated me” (G15, 157-162). Although their work was initially regarded as more important than income, financial needs for young employees in FWAs changed over time, resulting in dissatisfaction with their salaries.

In 2005, most FWAs implemented a new collective agreement as a consequence of the changes in government funding. This agreement is rather inflexible and income is only increased according to the length of tenure and is independent of an individual’s performance (Dahme et al., 2007). As the new agreement affected primarily employees who entered FWAs after 2005, our respondents’ compensations were lower than their colleagues who predated the agreement. One female social worker speaks of the impact of the new agreement: “Especially since the new collective agreement, if you want to switch employers, one starts all over again, like an entry-level job. Contracts involve length of employment [as means of salary increase] and do not consider age or experience level as did previous agreements. Now it is only according to seniority on the job” (G5, 383-388).

Current collective agreements not only offer compensation levels that are on the lower end for jobs that require an academic degree, but they also group young employees into wage groups of a lower educational level (e.g., social workers are paid only as much as kindergarten

teachers/educators). One social worker described this as follows: “With my organization, the only jobs that exist are those as kindergarten teachers. Although I am a social worker, I get paid less. I find that disappointing. [. . .] The quality of my professional work is thus questioned. [. . .] It is difficult to get good people for so little money” (G4, 51-56). Having no prospect of higher wage levels or significant increases in compensation while being employed in FWAs, some interviewees question the likelihood of staying long term: “Right now, I am okay working here, I can buy myself something to eat, but of course, you have to consider what the future will be. I cannot sit on [this] position for the next 50 years. That’s what I think about it” (G7, 227-230).

Religiously affiliated FWAs were not obligated to accept the new collective agreements and oftentimes their independent agreements undercut the collective agreement and increased weekly working hours (Dahme et al., 2007). Their employees were frustrated, as expressed by one social worker: “We have an organization-based wage-level agreement, and I regard wage levels [according to the collective agreement] as impudence! I also know that I would have been at least rated two wage levels higher if the collective agreement salary would have been enforced, and not the organization-based agreement. [. . .] The collective agreement pays social workers the lowest possible salary for teachers; it is bad enough, but our organization-based agreement falls even below [that]” (G24, 169-176). Although initially employees were willing to accept wage levels offered by collective agreements, they argued they would not be able to do so in the long run. Furthermore, collective agreements were not felt to be fair given the professional nature of work. These experiences reflected unfair compensation policy and can affect work motivation negatively (Tortia, 2008).

Finally, opportunities for growth were a recurring theme in interview transcripts. Entry-level employees in FWAs tended to pursue career-enhancing moves by frequently changing employers. A health care manager reported, “I think you have a certain goal in life that you wish to achieve, perhaps within a few years, and therefore it is often not helpful to stay only with one organization, but to experience several employers and thereby determining [. . .] in what area you fit in the best” (G8, 145-149). Stagnation in professional life was seen as negative; young employees preferred more flexible and varied careers. The desire to grow and learn while making sustainable progress in their careers was realized by changing jobs within areas of welfare work over the course of their career. One employee said, “I only started working four years ago, but one recognizes that you don’t want to do the same things over and over again. But here, you have many possibilities, either within the organization or in other areas in the sector . . . Everything is possible” (G3, 148-152).

However, the reality faced in FWAs was often different from their initial expectations. The majority of interviewees reported a lack of training and support on behalf of the FWAs to experience the variety they were seeking. Furthermore, they did not feel they had real opportunities to grow in their area of welfare work. As this social worker explained, “This is an issue within the organization. There are no paths for professional development. It is a smaller provider and there is no middle management. The lack of potential is frustrating” (G1, 248-252).

Interviewees indicated that FWAs are restricted in terms of monetary resources to fund training and have other priorities for allocating their funds. For instance, funds intended for employee trainings were used up early in the year and employees had to pay for further education or training. Planned professional development was often missing in FWAs, as this interviewee indicated: “There is no training. If you want it, you have to request it at several different places in the organization, and you only rarely get it granted. That’s not great at all” (G14, 154-156). Employees were dissatisfied since there were few possibilities for professional development in FWAs.

The expectations that young employees brought with them to the workplace focused around relationships with colleagues and teamwork, the working conditions in FWAs, salaries, and the possibilities for further development. Very often those expectations were not aligned with the actual experiences in FWAs as discussed in this section.

The final category that emerged was job dissatisfaction. The analysis of the interviews suggests that the young employees often experienced differences between their initial expectations and the

actual work environment, as noted in the category above; those experiences negatively influenced their job satisfaction. The biggest differences occurred related to their values, compensation levels, and the economic environment of FWAs; the discussion below illustrates this in each of these categories in turn.

Some interviewees reported that clients did not appreciate their altruistic values and effort. As one interviewee put it, "I approached work very optimistically with the idea I can do something, and help support someone. I have just realized none of my clients I work with is really ready to accept me, my help, or to learn from me. So, not everyone was happy about me showing up and wanting to help. All the energy and optimism I arrived with slowed a bit. Yes, I was disappointed and I set back my own expectations . . . I simply demanded less from the young people. I just had to adapt, then it went quite well" (G14, 127-135).

Others reported a lack of congruence between personal values and organizational values, as this male management graduate explains: "I had to back off my expectations, because otherwise I would have gone home from work in a bad mood every day or given up. But I still have hope. The biggest disappointment was that the organizational ideology is not what I hoped for" (G23, 128-131). Young employees often adapt their behavior and hence change parts of their expectations and even personal values as they learn about and experience their work (Roberts et al., 2003). If no coping adaptation takes place, decreases in work motivation and performance are likely to occur (Amos & Weathington, 2008). There was also a mismatch among the expectations and realities regarding compensation levels. Nonprofit employees do not expect their wages to be high, but they do not expect compensation to be too low to fulfill their personal needs. Furthermore, young employees with no previous experience living independently were initially satisfied with their wages and misjudged their expenses as they planned their own families and found themselves unable to meet their expectations. One male social worker commented, "In this job or in this area, you certainly cannot feed a family. I wasn't aware of that before I started to work. As I said, it is simply more important to me to work with those people and back then, I was not thinking about the money" (G15, 143-147). Thus, intrinsic motivation does not outweigh low pay when there are changes in personal needs and the individual circumstances (Frey, 1997).

Additionally, perceived inequities in wages in comparison to other employees leads to decreased job satisfaction concomitant with absenteeism, burnout, and decreased work motivation (Van Dierendonck, Schaufeli, & Buunk, 1996; Geurts, Schaufeli, & Rutte, 1999). Feelings of inequitable pay were prevalent among the interviewees as this youth welfare service employee explains: "When I worked for the low salary equivalent to that of a kindergarten teacher, I was very upset. I just had this feeling I didn't want to work any more. I have to admit, since I got promoted [. . .] and work on social worker salary, I work more motivated" (G4, 55-58). The importance of fair monetary compensation on employees' job satisfaction should not be underestimated even for intrinsically motivated individuals.

The work environment in FWAs depends heavily on economic calculations that make FWAs more competitive with other providers of social service and health care delivery. Young employees bear the brunt of this as experienced in high workloads and long working hours. This reality did not match with their ideological and value-driven expectation of making a difference in the lives of the vulnerable, or realizing their potential, or having fun while working. As one young project manager stated, "Rarely in my life have I felt so powerless, and there were certainly moments when I did not know how to handle it" (G28, 227-228). FWAs tend toward contracting new employees on a temporary basis due to limited project-related funds and allowing employment contracts to expire, creating uncertainty among employees. As one employee complained, "Good people have to know in advance [if their contract is extended] in order to keep working" (G19, 144-145). Feelings of job insecurity influences job dissatisfaction, which in turn may lead to higher turnover rates (Geurts et al., 1999).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings propose several points of relevance in understanding the influence of work experiences on job satisfaction of young employees in German FWAs and raise questions for further study. Managing human resources in FWAs successfully requires understanding employee expectations and matching them to the realities currently underway in FWAs. In this qualitative study, we analyzed the expectations toward and experiences of work in a sample of 28 young FWA employees. They bring a variety of personal expectations with them to the workplace and, as the analysis suggests, those expectations often do not align with the work experiences. A mismatched alignment between expectations and work experiences negatively influences job satisfaction; it is therefore important to address the complexity of expectations.

Our findings corroborate the literature, which suggests that individuals self-select into work environments based on their values, motivations, and life experiences (Theuvsen, 2004; Cheverton, 2007), and look to match their values with the organization's mission (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003). We also were able to confirm the desire for flexible and boundary-less career paths among those young employees (Haley-Lock, 2008).

Our study has some important implications for German FWAs and the broader nonprofit sector. Even though monetary rewards are not the main motivational factor for employees in nonprofit organizations, their impact on motivation should not be underestimated. Intrinsic motivation does not always outweigh low pay, since evaluation of payment levels might change along with changes in personal needs and values according to the individual situation (Frey, 1997). First, it is natural that young employees in their mid-20s to early 30s might think about starting a family. It seems that current payment levels in FWAs do not provide young employees with the means they would need to sustain a family.

Second, while being relatively inexperienced, they tend to realize the actual value of their pay only after having started their jobs—often the amount is considered to be too low considering the quality and quantity of work they are doing. Third, we know from the literature that feelings of unfair pay affect work motivation (Frey, 1997; Tortia, 2008). Collective agreements in FWAs not only offer payment levels that are on the lower end, but now young employees tend to be grouped into wage groups of a lower educational level contrary to their expectations. Hence, payment levels are perceived to be unfair and do not meet expectations. This was particularly striking as the values proclaimed by FWAs lead to high expectations concerning wage fairness. Similarly, expectations of “making a difference” in their work and having colleagues with similar values were unrealized, leading to further job dissatisfaction. Ultimately, even though they were initially attracted by the “doing good” nature of FWAs, young employees are disenchanted by the gap they perceive between expectation and reality.

Three approaches could be helpful to reduce this gap: First, organizational management and leadership might adapt current contract policies to consider the impact of lower wages on employees as they get older; second, HRM can influence expectations through recruitment and selection strategies; and third, nonprofit organizations may change to a more professional and value-driven HRM to meet expectations of the young employees.

In recruiting employees, FWAs should make clear how the economic conditions and changes in government policies impact working condition. The employment contract should be clear about older employees who predate the contract and are therefore employed on different terms. As employees grow older, counseling should be provided regarding financial planning given that salaries may not increase as quickly as employee needs. Counseling upon recruitment should also address the working realities of FWAs, such as the constraints employees might face in striving to make a difference or clients who don't always appreciate their efforts, however well intentioned. FWAs could proactively mitigate for unrealistic expectations and reduce any dissatisfaction likely to occur by implementing realistic job previews whereby all relevant aspects of the job are made

known to the applicants as precisely as possible (Bowen & Siehl, 1997). In addition, new-employee orientation programs and mentorships with colleagues would help the transition for new employees.

Feedback talks with young employees might mitigate frustration if employees understand organizational pressures and the economic context under which FWAs must operate. Although understanding employee frustrations and appreciating one's work—especially since work outcomes are often intangible—may serve as platform to discuss and set professional targets and career development prospects within the FWA, it's a point widely criticized by the interviewees. FWAs could enhance job satisfaction by offering some professional development possibilities (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2008). A strategic approach for career planning and implementing intermediary positions might improve retention of qualified and motivated employees while offering clear possibilities of career advancement within the FWA (Kim & Lee, 2007).

This study, however, is not without limitations. The applied snowball sampling technique could potentially account for a skewed sample. Young employees extremely dissatisfied with their employment may have been more likely to participate. Future research should adopt a more rigorous sampling approach in order to account for a self-selection of potential interviewees. The applied sampling technique also led to a heterogeneous sample of FWA operating in different fields of welfare work. Future studies should explore if there are variations within fields.

A future line of research might focus on longitudinal research methods for improving our understanding of initial expectations and motivations of young nonprofit employees and their subsequent work experiences and levels of job satisfaction while working in FWAs. Also, current HRM strategies in FWAs should be analyzed as the context in order to detect potential areas of improvement. Researching those areas will allow German FWAs and other social service providers to address challenges from increasing competition and future policy changes proactively, ultimately enabling them to increase their performance and achieve their missions.

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