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| Organizational and Learning Factors Affecting Skill Utilization of Older Workers in South Korea  **Hyunok Yoo, Doo Hun Lim, Junghwan Kim, In Tak Kwon** |
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| Paper: Roundtable |
| The purpose of this study is to examine how organizational and learning factors affect older workers’ skill utilization in the workplace in South Korea. Using OECD Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) data released in 2013, the study analyzed 1861 older workers’ demographics, employment, and learning participation data in South Korea. This article concludes with discussions and implications for research, practice, and policy, based on our findings. |
| Problem and Purpose Statement  Rapid ageing has become a critical issue in many public and private organizations. For example, the older population, 65 and older will reach about 20 % in 2050 in the U.S. (Shrestha and Heisler, 2011). Baby boomers have already retired or about to retire from the workforce. In this fast pace of ageing, workplace organizations will face a significant labor shortage in the near future. Therefore, organizations are required to establish key initiatives to fill the void in the organizational manpower. Many researchers indicate that maintaining older workers in the organizations is a key to sustain competitiveness edges for organizational success (Bhagat et al., 2002; Gellert and Jan de Graaf, 2012; Gherardi, 2006).  Literature shows that older workers still participate in the labor market and aspire to learn and develop their competencies through various types of learning and education (Kooij et al., 2014). The OECD skills survey by the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) identified various findings about older adults’ workplace competencies in the developed countries. Especially, the data sets indicate various important findings about older generations’ literacy, numeracy, and problem solving competencies. Also the data sets provide useful findings about their skill use in the workplace. As the skill use of workers within organizational setting becomes a key asset to improve individual and organizational performance, identifying what aspects of older workers learning, education, and surrounding workforce conditions affect their skill use is a critical research topic.  The purpose of this study is to examine how organizational and learning factors affect older workers’ skill utilization in the workplace in South Korea. This study will use the data from OECD Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) released in 2013.  Literature Review  One of the characteristics of today’s workforce is longer lifespan and ageing workers (National Institute on Aging, 2015). This phenomena influence older workers to continue their work after their retirement age. In many organizations, older workers would stay even with a lower pay rate due to their desire to work and life fulfillment and due to their personal affection toward the organization (Schleicher et al., 2011). Another critical issue of ageing workforce ‘brain drain’ in the workplace organizations (Pitt-Catsouphes and Matz-Costa, 2009). As baby boomers exit the workforce, many organizations are suffering from a critical shortage of skilled workers. In overcoming this significant issue, organizations have initiated various organizational measures (e.g., flexible working hours, job sharing, ergonomic work environment, etc).  Older worker’s participation in various types of learning and educational programs demonstrates higher literacy and numeracy skills in the developed countries (Desjardins & Rubenson, 2013). Especially, non-formal learning and education plays an important role in helping adults develop and maintain job related knowledge and skills throughout their lifespan (Dämmrich et al., 2016). In the OECD Skills Outlook 2013, the survey results show a strong positive relationship between participation in non-formal learning and skills proficiency levels.  The OECD Skills Outlook 2013 reports twelve indicators of skill levels at work. They are: information-processing skills (reading, writing, numeracy, ICT skills, and problem solving) and general skills (task discretion, learning at work, influencing skills, co-operative skills, planning and self-organizing skills, gross physical skills, and dexterity) (OECD, 2013). These days, skills use at work does matter at the same importance with developing skills in the first place. How employees use skills in the workplace is crucial because, as for workers, higher skills use at work is associated with higher wages and higher job satisfaction (Albert et al., 2010). At the country level, the use of reading and writing skills correlates strongly with labor productivity (OECD, 2013).  Research questions  In addressing the study purpose, we propose the following research questions based on related review of literature.   1. How older workers’ demographic variables affect their skill use in the workplace? 2. What organizational factors affect older workers’ skill use in the workplace? 3. To what extent older workers’ learning participation and activities affect their skill use in the workplace?   Methods  Our primary data was obtained from the open source of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) that was coordinated by the Organizational Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The data were collected from 24 countries between August 2011 and March 2012, and each country drew a representative sample of individuals aged from 16 to 65 years old. The questionnaire measured three key cognitive skills: literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving in technology-rich environments. The questionnaire also assessed adults’ proficiency in key information-processing competencies to participate in workplace and society, which allowed determining the impact of adults’ competencies on their life chances. In addition, the questionnaire captured various types of learning activities the participants engaged in either for job or non-job related reasons.  Based on our research purpose, we restricted the sample to include baby boomers and traditionalists (50-54 and 55-65 years old) who were in employment on the private sector at the time of survey in South Korea. The rationale to include this target population is that several researchers considered age 50 or 55 as the lower end of the older worker cohort (Baltes et al., 2006; Moeller, 2013).  As a result, 1247 (above 50 years old) data set was used for the final analysis. In terms of the demographic information of our sample, about 44% were female. With respect to education level, approximately 70% had less than upper secondary education; about 21% had post-secondary or college-level degrees; 7.3% had graduate-level degrees. For age, about 51% of the participants were between 50 and 55 years; approximately 33% were between 56 or 60 years old; and about 16% were between 61 and 65 years old.  Variables  This study selected skill use at work and information-processing proficiency as dependent variables for the analysis. For independent variables, the following are included:  Dependent Variables   * Skill use for work: Numeracy, Literacy * Proficiency test scores: Numeracy, Literacy   Demographic variables:   * Age * Gender (1-male, 2-female) * Education (1-middle, 2-high, 3-college, 4-graduate) * Employment status 2 (1-fulltime, 2-contract, 3-daily contract) * Employment type (1-fulltime, 2-part-time, 3-not working, 4-student, 5-intern, 6-retired, etc.) * Work experiences (years) * Public vs. private sector * Managing others (1-yes, 2-no) * Managing how many (1:10-5, 2:6-10, 3:11-24, 4:25-99, 5:more than 100)   Organizational context   * Work flexibility (sequence of tasks, how to do the work, speed of work, working hours) (4) * Learning opportunity (learning from peers/supervisors, learning by doing, keeping up to date) (3)   Learning and education   * Active learning strategies (relate new ideas, learning new things, attribute something new, bottoming of difficult things, fit different ideas together, look additional info) * Participation in non-formal education * Participation in formal or non-formal education * Participation in formal or non-formal adult education program (job-related) * Participation in formal or non-formal adult education program (non job-related) * Number of hours of participation in non-formal education   From the data analysis, we expect meaningful findings to apply to the development of adult workers who are agile performers in the workplace organizations. At the same time, we expect our study findings contribute the field of adult education and organization development. |
| Keywords: older workers, organizational variables, non formal education, skill use |