

DIFFERENTIATING OUTBACK MINERS

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Central Queensland, (Outback) Australia, is the scene of many opencut mines developed to export coal. This study looks at the population of one of these company mining towns and identifies the types of people who relocate in such places. "Coalcut" (not the actual name of the town) is an isolated center about 250 km from the Queensland coast. The population of the township is approximately 600 and it is isolated in terms of distance from other centers of population and accessibility in wet weather. The town was constructed by the company to support its adjacent mine which began producing coal in 1983.

THEORY BASE

Inasmuch as this was a study to identify the types of people who relocate in such isolated areas, a modified version of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of human needs was selected as a base. As Dick (1984) points out, Maslow's hierarchy is, among other things, a taxonomy or classification of human needs. He argues that Maslow's hierarchy was offered as a theory of human motivation and that motivation can claim to underlie most human behavior. The motivation to settle in an isolated location such as Coalcut underlies the iden-

tification of types of people relocating to the area. Dick has taken the traditional hierarchy--physiological, safety, social, esteem, self-actualization--and has suggested a revised version: Physical well-being, conditional acceptance by others, conditional self-acceptance, unconditional acceptance by others, and unconditional self-acceptance.

Dick accepts the first category as physical well-being. He sees safety as the future component of all categories except self-actualization, and suggests that esteem subsumes two components, one being self-derived esteem and the other esteem derived through others, the latter being related to social or belongingness needs and carrying a performance implication: It is earned while belongingness is decided by other factors. The dimension may be labelled unconditional versus conditional acceptance. Self-esteem also involves acceptance, but by oneself. It therefore appears that the psychological dimensions of well-being may be described in terms of acceptance which is either conditional or unconditional, and which is derived either from oneself or from others. He argues that unconditional self-acceptance can be identified with self-actualization. Dick has also shown that the revised hierarchy takes account of much overlap in motivation theory.

It can be argued that motivation of the individual in any organization must be based on the interaction of individual and organizational needs, and that at any time one set of needs may take precedence over the other. Coalcut is at the establishment level of the organizational hierarchy proposed by Wolff (1976) because it was set up 18 months ago to support the adjacent mine and is at the basic level of Wolff's hierarchy: Establishment, security, positional, public image, and total human benefit.

The establishment level is the set-up level where all the energies of the people involved are harnessed to get the company functioning. After the initial frenzy and acceptance that all is not perfect, the organization tries to streamline its operations and build in such things as superannuation and benefits for employees, to set up the organizational structure

in a formal manner, at which point the security stage has arrived. The organization then becomes concerned about its position in its own industry group and competes to be the best or largest or most productive.

That organizational need filled, the next item for concern is the public image of the organization where concern is expressed for how the publics of the organization see that organization, and much money is spent on public relations drives to place the organization in front of the people in a favorable way. The top level of Wolff's hierarchy is total human benefit where the organization looks after its employees and its publics and tries to do the best by all.

The opinion statements for this Q sort were subdivided into groups based on Dick's and Woff's hierarchies. Employees for the isolated organization were interviewed in the corporate headquarters before they left for their isolated existences. Opinion statements were selected from the interviews and used to build a 36-item Q sort which was administered on site.

Subjects for this study were 68 residents of Coalcut, eight of whom were wives of mine workers. Two respondents were contractors, and the rest were employees of the mine. Fourteen of the respondents were female, the remaining male. Only 14 of the respondents were single (one female, 13 male), the rest being married or living as couples. Thirteen of the 68 respondents were not Australian-born, coming mainly from the United Kingdom.

SUMMARIES OF THE FACTORS

The Anxious Opportunist

There are 35 people defining factor 1, which comprises only employees of the mine, five females and 30 males. There are 11 singles, and all are male. Of the 13 non-Australians in the sample, 8 are in this type. The trade/skills background of subjects in this type is significant in that fitters figure prominently in the male group and secretaries/clerks in the female group. This may also explain why this group ex-

pects the unions to look after them. They are mainly there for the money but are very aware of the problems posed by isolation and are concerned with the lack of social amenities. Something of the concerns of factor 1 can be gleaned by examining those statements which both characterize the positive end of the factor array and also served to distinguish this factor from the other two:

There is more likelihood of the family unit breaking down in towns like this than in other more well-established centres.

One of the things that worries me about living here is the shortage of special school and medical facilities.

Entertainment opportunities for teenagers are a problem, particularly in places like this.

The breakdown of the family unit, family health, education and entertainment are major anxieties for this type. There is little belief in team spirit which has been replaced by an acute awareness of status differences associated with working there. This supports the findings of Williams (1981) who found great social distances between company executives and workers in the coal towns of central Queensland.

The Company Dependent

There are 19 subjects in this factor, including the two contractors and two of the 8 wives. This group is predominantly married male; there is only one single person, a female. There are six migrants in this group, which consists of a range of occupational backgrounds including miner, service engineer, and wife of the personnel manager. People in this group do not see the family unit as under pressure in the way that factor 1 people do, and tend instead to be optimistic about their situation. This is reflected in those statements to which factor 2 assigned higher scores than did the other two factors:

People come here for a combination of money, promo-

tion, and lifestyle.

There is no "we-they" attitude in this town. We're a one-class town.

The company will make sure there are plenty of recreational facilities in the area.

Hence, factor 2 people feel comfortable with the financial and environmental climate the company provides, and with the idea of living in a one-class town. Their motivation is therefore different from factor 1, no less than factor 3 which views the financial situation more as a challenge than a burden.

The Self-Actualizing Pioneer

Fourteen persons define factor 3, including six of the wives of employees and eight male employees, six of whom are married. Although some of the females are wives of mine executives, the males are mainly from trade backgrounds. This type is the true "establishment"-level person in that team work is seen as important and Australia is seen as providing opportunities to contribute to the development of a new community and to feel the traditional Australian pioneering spirit. Again, this is reflected in those positive statements which distinguish factor 3:

There is a pioneering spirit here.

Australia is the "lucky" country and in places like this you can still find jobs and opportunities.

This pioneering spirit also finds reinforcement in those statements disagreement with which likewise distinguishes factor 3:

People come here for a combination of money, promotion, and lifestyle.

Most people come to work here because of the attractive salaries and fringe benefits.

One of the things that worries me about living here is the shortage of special school and medical facilities.

This is the pioneer, or at least this type perceives himself or herself as a pioneer and is prepared to accept the initial hardships as part of the challenge.

CONCLUSIONS

In terms of the few statements reported above plus additional evidence in the factor arrays, the three types identified can be seen as representative of what could be expected in a new mining organization in an isolated location.

The Anxious Opportunist is the person who takes advantage of the opportunity to go to an isolated location for the job and the money it provides. Given the current high unemployment levels in the Australian mining industry, the new mines provide some opportunity to work. The status differences in such communities are acknowledged but the attractions of the isolated area outweigh such disadvantages. Isolated areas are attractive for the reason that companies are prepared to pay very high wages and provide subsidised housing and other amenities at low cost. This subsidised existence is more likely to occur in an organization at establishment level than it is in a well-established organization. The better established the organization, the more able it is to provide incentives. The Anxious Opportunist realizes the problems of living in an isolated area and perhaps is over-anxious about them. Stress on the family relationship is prominent in his or her concern and yet 11 of the 35 in this type are single. Their projection of the family environment in this situation is more negative than the actual experiences of families in factors 2 and 3. The team spirit is not as important as individual effort, and this person is likely to make opportunities rather than think that Australia or the company will provide.

The Company Dependent is common to most company towns. This type consists mainly of the married male who is a miner (or in a related trade or profession) and goes where the work is. He is happy enough with the lifestyle the company provides and thinks it is a good place for his family, at least in terms of ameni-

ties. This person seems to take little notice of the status differences which exist in such communities, or maybe just accepts them as the lifestyle pattern.

The Self-Actualizing Pioneer shows the effect of the establishment level of an organization on the individual. Here are the pioneers who want to contribute to the new community and think that the initial hardships involved, such as moving and lack of facilities, are worthwhile. While they realize the importance of team spirit in this stage of organization and community development, they also acknowledge the status differences and that working together in a team does not necessarily breed friendship.¹

In terms of underlying motivational theory, the effect of the establishment level of the organizational hierarchy proposed by Wolff is seen in factor 1 with the attraction of the incentives offered by the company to the initial workers and the anxiety experienced by the Anxious Opportunist. Factor 2 is the Company Dependent, and the lifestyle provided by the company at this stage is attractive to him and his family. The uncertain aspects of such a lifestyle in the normal establishment phase of an organization are probably countered in this instance because he knows the parent company is a well-recognized and very stable organization. Factor 3 enjoys the challenge and need for team spirit that the establishment level brings with it. It is interesting that six of the eight wives in the sample see themselves as self-actualizers, which may be the way they rationalize their lifestyles in Coalcut.

Dick's version of Maslow can be seen in factor 1. The physical well-being aspects are evidenced by the concern about the pressures of living in an isolated community; however, this type is keen to submit in return for money. The Anxious Opportunist is aware of

1. In Australian nomenclature, friendship and mateship are very different concepts, with friendship meaning a chosen bond based on mutual trust and mateship being a type of acquaintance based on common interests such as work or drinking in the pub. In other words, one's mate is not necessarily one's friend.

status differences but relies more on self than others to provide, so is not really a social being but more likely to be concerned with conditional or unconditional self-acceptance. Conditional self-acceptance would be seen when he or she places some constraints on his or her own performance and only accepts the best; unconditional self-acceptance would be seen when the person accepts self without such judgments.

The Company Dependent manifests the physical well-being component with emphasis on lifestyle and unconditional acceptance by others in terms of seeing no we-they attitude, which means that they accept others unconditionally and expect others to do likewise.

Factor 3 is the Self-Actualizing Pioneer looking for the challenge of something new. This person experiences conditional acceptance by others because he or she is very aware of the we-they attitude, and is not so concerned with financial aspects as with unconditional self-acceptance because of the desire to forge a new community.

A follow-up study is in progress involving residents of a mining town nearer the coast and other communities, and therefore not so isolated. It will be interesting to see if the same types emerge. However, it is anticipated that basic individual motivation will probably hold firm and that organizational level plus physical environment will be most influential in the formulation of types.

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