

A Review on Generational Differences and Work-related Attitude

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Abstract

Over the years, there is a growing attention on generational differences and work attitudes among academician and practitioners. Researchers have investigated generational differences on organizational commitment, job satisfaction and turnover intention, yet the issue concerning generational differences on these work attitudes is still debatable. Hence, this article reviews the past studies concerning generational differences and their work-related attitudes in the period of fifteen years. Based on the review, we found that younger generation tends to have lower overall commitment, affective commitment as well as normative commitment compared to older generations. We also found a decrease in job satisfaction and a noticeable upward trend in turnover intention among younger generations. The review also found that generational differences and work-related attitudes also vary across different context of research setting.

Keywords: Generational Differences, Work Attitudes, Organizational commitment, Affective commitment, Job Satisfaction, Intention to Leave/Stay, Review

Introduction

For the first time ever, four generations of employees are working side by side in the same organization (Bennet, Pit & Price, 2012). Practitioner and academicians alike are interested to investigate these multigenerational groups with emerging claims that they exemplify different work attitudes. These differences in attitudes may directly or indirectly contribute to intergenerational conflict and consequently influence organizational performance

(McGuire *et al.*, 2007). However, the issue concerning generational differences on work attitudes, primarily organizational commitment, job satisfaction and job satisfaction is still debatable.

Before reviewing evidences of differences in work attitudes, it is important to acknowledge the definition and categorization of generations. According to Mannheim (1952), a generation can be defined as a group of individuals born within the same historical and sociocultural context, who experience similar formative experiences and therefore develop unifying commonalities. In the workplace, an employee can be categorized into four categories; i) the Veterans (also known as Traditionalist, Matures or the silent Generation born between and end of World War II; 1945), ii) Baby Boomers (people who born between the end of World War II and the early to mid-1960), iii) Gen X (people who born between the early to mid-1960s and the mid to late 1980s) and Gen Y (also known as Millennials, Generation Me, Nexters born between the late 1970s to early 1980s or the late 1990s) (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade, 2012; Parry & Urwin, 2011; Twenge, 2010). As highlighted by Lyons & Kuron, (2014), there is also other categorization used in previous studies with descriptions ranging from highly general (e.g., “younger vs. older”) to highly specific (e.g., “early-middle- and late-Boomers”). Despite the different terms used to denote generational differences, Pilcher (1994) argued that the precise boundaries chosen to demarcate the generations are not crucially important. This is because generational trends should reveal themselves despite the “fuzziness” of the boundaries between generations.

As noted by Costanza *et al.* (2012) workplace is the setting where generational differences have been widely written about. In a work setting, such simplifications and generalized differences among groups of employees could have major implications for the way organizations recruit, hire, train, reward, promote, and terminate their employees. Although there are numerous studies examined generational differences specifically on work attitudes such as those by Costanza *et al.* (2012), Gursoy *et al.* (2013), Solnet and Kralj (2011), yet it is still difficult to confirm the existence of differences across different generations and the issue is still debatable as there were also number of studies reveal generational similarities instead of differences on work attitude (Jones, 2014; Malone, 2014; Nelson, 2012; Robson & Robson, 2015). Therefore, this article reviews the past studies concerning generational differences and their work-related attitudes in the period of fifteen years.

This study provides two main contributions to the literature. First, this study incorporates a significant amount of up-to date review of the evidence concerning generational differences on work attitudes, specifically organization commitment, job satisfaction and behavioral intention. Second, this study provides a number of directions and recommendation for future research that build from significant gaps in the existing body of knowledge. Hence, this review further enlightens future researchers regarding the evidence base of studies focusing on differences in work attitudes as well as the variations in terms of the context of the study.

Literature Search

A literature search in the fields of management, organizational behavior, work and organizational psychology, applied psychology was conducted through several databases. In specific, eight databases were utilized to attain the related articles namely, EMERALD, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor and Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, JSTOR, ProQuest and Google Scholar. Articles and dissertation published from 2003 to 2018 were considered for this review. This review focuses on generational differences in work-related attitudes, specifically known as commitment, job satisfaction and turnover intention (e.g. intention to

stay, intention to quit/leave, intention to continue working.) The following search were used for the literature search: “generational differences”, “generational comparison”, “generational similarity” and “work attitudes across generations”. The literature search yielded 24 studies.

Findings

Table 1 shows the summaries of the included studies on the generational differences and work-related attitudes in the past fifteen years.

	References	Variables	Measurement	Sample	Sector	Country	Findings
1	Ferres, Travaglione & Firms (2003)	Organizational Commitment Affective Continuance Turnover intention	Allen & Meyer (1990) Michigan assessment (Cammann <i>et al.</i> , 1979).	Older Gen, Gen X employee	An organization	Australia	0 + + Older Generations > Gen X Gen X > Older Generations
2	Chan (2005)	Job satisfaction Intention to stay	Job Descriptive Index (JDI)/Job In General (JIG)	Gen X, Gen Y employee	Various sectors	U.S	+ + Gen X > Gen Y Gen X > Gen Y
3	Wallace (2006)	Work commitment	Not stated	B.Boomer, Gen X Lawyers	Law Firm	Canada	0 All
4	Westerman & Yamamura (2007)	Satisfaction	Satisfaction (Agho <i>et al.</i> , 1992)	B.Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y	Various sectors	U.S	0 All
5	Cennamo and Gardner (2008)	Intention to leave Job satisfaction Affective commitment	Allen & Meyer (1991)	B.Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y employee	Various sectors	New Zealand	+ + 0 Gen Y > Gen X > Baby Boomer B.Boomer and Gen X > Gen Y All
6	D’Amato and Herzfeld (2008)	Intention to stay Organizational Commitment	Zedeck <i>et al.</i> (1983); Mowday <i>et al.</i> (1984).	B.Boomer, Gen X	Various sector	Europe	+ + B.Boomer > Gen X B.Boomer > Gen X
7	Patalano (2008)	Organizational commitment Affective	Meyer & Allen (1993)	B.Boomer, Gen X	Communication organization	U.S	+ + + Gen X > Gen Y Gen Y > Gen X Gen X > Gen Y

		Continuance Normative						
8	LeVasseur, Wang, Mathews & Boland (2009)	Turnover intention (length of stay)	LeVasseur <i>et al.</i> , 2009)	Veterans, B.Boomer, Gen XY Nurses	Health-care	U.S	+	Veterans>B.Boomer> Gen XY
9	Kowske, Rasch & Wiley (2010)	Job satisfaction	Gnatz WordTrend item	GI, Silent, B.Boomer, Gen X, GenY	Various industry	U.S	+	GI > late Boomers; Late Gen Y >Late Boomers
10	Solnet & Kralj, (2011)	Affective commitment Job satisfaction Intention to Quit	Meyer & Allen (1993); Nishii <i>et al.</i> (2009) Colarelli (1984)	Non-Gen Y, Gen Y employee	Hospitality	Australia	+	Non Gen Y> Gen Y + Non Gen Y> Gen Y + Gen Y> Non Gen Y
11	Benson & Brown (2011)	Job satisfaction Organizational commitment Willingness to quit (WQ).	Price and Mueller (1981) Porter <i>et al.</i> (1974) Mowday <i>et al.</i> (1979)	B.Boomer, Gen X researcher	Research institution	Australia	+	B.Boomer> Gen X + B.Boomer> Gen X + Gen X>B.Boomer
12	Inelmen,Zeytinoglu & Uygur (2012)	Job Satisfaction	Spector (1997)	Gen X, Gen Y employee	Hospitality	Turkey	+	Gen Y> Gen X
13	Brunetto, Far-Wharton & Shacklock (2012)	Affective commitment	Meyer and Allen(1991)	B.Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y Nurse	Healthcare	Australia	+	B.Boomer> Gen X and Gen Y
14	Nelson (2012)	Affective commitment	Meyer and Allen(1991)	B.Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y Nurse	Healthcare	Brazil	0	All
15	Lub, Bijvank, Baal,Blomme & Schalk (2012)	Affective commitment Continuance commitment Turnover intention	Ten Brink (2004)	B.Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y employee	Hospitality	The Netherlands	+	Gen X>Gen Y + Gen X>Gen Y + Gen Y>Gen X and B.Boomer

16	To & Tam (2014)	Job Satisfaction	Kalleberg (1977)	Gen X, Gen Y, Early Gen Y employee	Manufacturing	China	+	Gen X>Early Gen Y Gen Y>Early Gen Y
17	Coburn & Hall (2014)	Job Satisfaction	Hackman and Oldman (1975)	B.Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y nurses	Healthcare	U.S	+	B.Boomer> Gen X and Gen Y
18	Jones (2014)	Organizational commitment	Allen and Meyer (1990)	B.Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y nurses	Healthcare	U.S	0	All
19	Malone (2014)	Organizational commitment	Allen and Meyer (1990)	B.Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y employee	Manufacturing	U.S	0	All
20	Robson & Robson (2015)	Intention to continue working	Shacklock <i>et al.</i> (2009)	B.Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y nurses	Healthcare	U.K	0	All
21	Singh & Gupta (2015)	Organizational commitment Affective Continuance Normative Professional commitment Team commitment	Allen and Meyer (1990)	Veterans, B.Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y employee	Various sectors	India	0 0 + 0 + + + +	B.Boomer and Veterans; B.Boomer and Gen X B.Boomer and Gen Y All Veterans>B.Boomer >GenX>Gen Y Gen Y> B.Boomer>Gen X>Veterans Veterans> Gen Y; B.Boomer> Gen Y
22	Marasinghe & Wijayarathne (2016)	Job Satisfaction - Perception of i. Work performed ii. Co-workers iii. Compensation	Not Stated	B.Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y Library staff	Education	Sri Lanka	+ 0 0 0 +	B.Boomer>Gen Y>Gen X All All Non-statistically significant Gen Y> B.Boomer> Gen X

		iv. Promotion v. Supervision						
2 3	Reddit, Gregory & Ro (2017)	Organizational Commitment Affective Continuance Normative Intention to stay	Meyer and Allen (1997) Steers (1977)	B.Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y				+ 0 0 + Older Gen > Gen Y Gen X>Gen Y> B.Boomer
2 4	Cucina, Byle, Martin, Peyton & Gast (2018)	Job Satisfaction		Traditionalist, B. Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y	Public Administration Organization	US	+	Older Group > Gen Y (Small magnitude of differences)

Significance difference/s(+); No significant difference/s (0); higher/ more value (>)

Table 2

shows the categorization of the work attitudes which include organizational commitment, Job satisfaction and turnover intention.

	References	Organizational commitment				JS	ITS/ITL
		G	AC	CC	NC		
1	Ferres <i>et al.</i> (2003)		√	√			√
2	Chan (2005)					√	√
3	Wallace (2006)	√					
4	Westerman & Yamamura (2007)					√	
5	Cennamo and Gardner's (2008)		√			√	√
6	D'Amato and Herzfeld (2008)	√					√
7	Patalano (2008)		√	√	√		
8	LeVasseur <i>et al.</i> (2009)						√
9	Kowske <i>et al.</i> (2010)					√	
10	Solnet & Kralj, (2011)		√			√	√
11	Benson & Brown (2011)	√				√	√
12	Inelmen, Zeytinoglu & Uygur (2012)					√	
13	Brunetto <i>et al.</i> (2012)		√				
14	Nelson (2012)		√				
15	Lub <i>et al.</i> (2012)		√	√			√
16	To & Tam (2014)					√	
17	Coburn & Hall (2014)					√	
18	Jones (2014)	√					
19	Malone (2014)	√					
20	Robson & Robson (2015)						√

21	Sigh & Gupta (2015)		√	√	√		
22	Marasinghe & Wijyaratne (2016)					√	
23	Reddit <i>et al.</i> (2017)		√	√	√		√
24	Cucina <i>et al.</i> (2017)					√	

General commitment (G); Affective commitment (AC); Continuance commitment (CC); Normative commitment (NC); Job satisfaction (JS); Intention to stay (ITS); Intention to Leave (ITL)

Discussion

As demonstrated in table 1 and 2, majority of the studies, specifically 14 studies focused on comparing commitment across generations. Focusing on to overall commitment, out of five studies, only two studies showed significant differences (D'Amato & Herzfeld, 2008; Benson & Brown, 2011). However, our review on affective commitment revealed significant generational differences of affective commitment in six out of nine studies (Brunetto *et al.*, 2012; Lub *et al.*, 2012; Nelson, 2012; Patalano 2008; Reddit *et al.*, 2017; Solnet & Kralj, 2011). Meanwhile, out of four studies that examined continuance commitment, only two studies showed significant differences findings (Patalano 2008; Lub *et al.*, 2012) across generations. This review also found that out of four studies on normative commitment, three studies showed significant differences (Lub *et al.*, 2012; Singh & Gupta, 2015). It has been observed that the older generations are having more commitment compared to the younger ones. For instance, Baby Boomer and Gen X tends to be more committed to the organization than Gen Y group, particularly for overall, affective, and normative commitment. Nevertheless, different results were reported for continuance dimension of commitment such as those by Ferres *et al.* (2003) and Patalano (2008). In these studies, it was found that Gen X has higher continuance commitment compared to Baby Boomer group. Despite this contradictory finding, it needs to be highlighted that most studies focused on overall commitment as well as affective commitment rather than continuance and normative dimension of commitment.

Job satisfaction is another work attitude examined in this review. It was found that significant generational differences in job satisfaction was reported in ten out of 11 studies (Benson & Brown, 2011; Cenamo & Gardner, 2008; Chan, 2005; Coburn & Hall, 2014; Cucina *et al.*, 2018; Inelmen *et al.*, 2012; Kowske *et al.*, 2010; Marasinghe & Wijyaratne, 2016 (partially supported the differences); Solnet & Kralj, 2011; To & Tam, 2014). It has been proved that the older generations were more satisfied towards their job than the younger ones. However, study done by Kowske *et al.* (2010) and Inelmen *et al.* (2012) showed that younger generation tends to be more satisfied than the older generation. this is in line with the study by Clark (1996) which postulates that the relationship between job satisfaction and age is U-shaped, where it declines during the early years of employment, and will start to increase steadily towards retirement. Within the context of generational differences, GI group was actually having a higher satisfaction level, but the levels sharply decreased from GIs to Boomers and then increased steadily from Boomers to Gen Y. Meanwhile, there is only one study revealed a non-significance differences across generations (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007).

For intention to leave/stay, it was found that nine of the ten studies showed significant generational differences (Benson & Brown, 2011; Chan, 2005; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; D'Amato & Herzfeld, 2008; Ferres *et al.*, 2003; LeVasseur *et al.*, 2009; Lub *et al.*, 2012; Reddit

et al.,2017; Solnet & Kralj *et al.*,2011). The younger generations tend to show higher intention to leave/quit (lower intention to stay or continue to work) compared to older generations.

Based on table 1, the generational comparisons in work attitudes have been conducted in various countries. The Western countries had received more attention compared to non-Western countries. However, mixed findings were reported on work attitudes across generation for countries with different cultures. Therefore, it can be implied that cultural differences across countries may be one of the reasons why different generations behave and act differently. This is consistent with Mannheim's (1952) theory in which he claimed generation location explains different behaviors among different generations. Members of a generation are "similarly located," are exposed to the same phase of the collective process. To illustrate, Nelson (2012) examined generational differences in affective commitment among nurses in Brazil and found no significant differences on affective commitment among different generations. In contrast, a study by Brunetto *et al.* (2012) in Australia found significant differences in affective commitment among nurses across different generations.

Other than geographical factors, inconclusive findings is also observed across different sectors. Based on the review, the findings in the health care industry show insignificant generational differences in affective commitment (Nelson, 2012; Jones, 2014). However significant difference was reported for other types of industry like hospitality (Solnet & Kralj, 2011; Lub *et al.*,2012). Nevertheless, most studies focus on various sectors in a study therefore there is still lacking of evidences in relation to generational differences in different sectors.

Implication and Conclusion

In this review, we found that younger generation have lower overall organizational commitment as well as in affective and normative commitment than older generations. Clearly, there is a need for additional research on generational differences in this work-related outcome. If there are a notable and large differences on commitment across generations, especially among the newest generation entering the workplace, Gen Y, hence, it will help both academic and practitioner to identify strategies to enhance Gen Y's commitment.

In addition, we also found significant difference in patterns of job satisfaction and turnover intention among different generations. There is a decrease in job satisfaction with successive generations and an increasing trend in turnover intention among successive generations. The issue of turnover continues to be the main issue in any organization and this has been described as being unprecedented and critical within the latest group of employees entering the workforce, known as the generation Y (Yusoff, Queiri, Zakaria & Hisham, 2013). Following from findings of previous studies, it has been found that Gen Y showed higher turnover intention compared to older generation. In Malaysia specifically, there is a need for sound empirical justification in order to understand the reasons behind this turnover intention among GenY.

The review also highlighted the lack of research specifically in the financial industry particularly in the banking sector. This sector is considered as significant because according to the Asian Institute of Finance (2014) within the next six to seven years, Gen Y workforce is expected to increase to 50 per cent, which means that almost half of the people working in banks will be amongst Gen Y. It is thus imperative for organization to understand the differences of Gen Y's work attitudes compared with other generations in order to better manage them. This may have an implication on human resource management in general.

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