

An Exploratory Study on Indian Software Professionals towards Their Work Commitment and Interplay between Generation X and Y Associates

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the generational diversity inherent in the modern organizations. It examines the generational differences between Generation-X (born between 1960-1980) and Generation-Y (born between 1980-2000) professionals working in the software industry. The study attempts to explore whether there are generational differences in work commitment between the two age cohorts or it's only a myth. A total of 250 respondents belonging to Software industries were administered a questionnaire. 125 respondents were typically X-Generation and 125 were Y- Generation employees. 50% of the respondents in both the cases were males and 50% of the respondents were females. The study examined generational differences for the five types of work commitment -work involvement, job involvement, work group commitment, organizational commitment and professional commitment. Organizational commitment and professional commitment in turn had three components each- affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. Thus, a total of nine factors was examined for the study. The data was analyzed using two-tailed t-tests (pooled variances method). The results reveal that the two generations differed significantly only on three of the nine factors examined. Thus, the generations are more homogenous than heterogeneous in their work values and beliefs. This finding has serious implications for research and practice. It provides the HR managers a useful insight that the observed differences are attributable to other factors (career and stage of life) instead of being an exclusive and true 'generational divide'.

JEL. Classification: D83; I26; J10

Keywords: Generation-X, Generation-Y, Software Professionals, Work commitment, Generational Difference, Age cohort.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

India has a preponderantly young workforce. A large number of young professionals are joining the modern organizations. The organizations are thus increasingly becoming cross generational-with the older, not so old and the young co-existing under one roof. The three generations are inherently different-they approach work, work/life balance, loyalty, authority, accountability, delegation, motivation and reward systems differently, but yet need to work in teams to achieve organizational objectives. It is indeed a problem-a problem of

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dealing with diversity, based in economics, demographics and culture.

Introduction

Generation is a group of people who were born during a certain era and hence defined by age boundaries. A generation is defined as an identifiable group that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages, divided by five–seven years into the first wave, core group, and last wave (Kupperschmidt, 2000). They are contemporaries and tend to be similar based on their shared experiences during their formative years. They have shared the same historical, economic, cultural events and landmarks, listened to the same music and enjoyed the same theatre. Having shared similar experiences growing up, their values and attitudes, particularly about work-related topics, tend to be similar and conspicuously different from those of others that do not share the same cohort. Evidently, there are marked intra-generational similarity and a striking inter-generational diversity, which is an issue that requires consideration in workplace diversity management. A generational group, often referred to as a cohort, includes those who share historical or social life experiences, the effects of which are relatively stable over the course of their lives. These life experiences tend to distinguish one generation from another (Jurkiewicz and Brown, 1998). A cohort develops a personality that influences a person's feelings toward authority and organizations, what they desire from work, and how they plan to satisfy those desires (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

Researchers have identified four generations, which are as follows:

- (i) Matures-They are born between 1920-40 and are 70-90 years old now.
- (ii) Boomers-They are born between 1940-60 and are 50-70 years of age now.
- (iii) The Generation- X- They are born between 1960-80 and hence are 30-50 years of age now.
- (iv) The Generation- Y/ Millennials-They are born between 1980-2000 and are more than 30 years of age now.

Looking at the Indian demographic structure, we observe that India is a relatively young country, with those from 0-14 years of age constituting 31.5% of the population, those from 15-64 years of age constituting 63.3% of the population and those 65 years and over contributing to a meager 5.2% of the population. (CIA, 2008). The other organizations reflect this age structure diversity too. The generations differ in their values and individual characteristics, attitudes, influences, learning styles and idiosyncrasies, all of which have a strong bearing on organizational functioning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Generation- X

Gen X-ers grew up with financial, family, and societal insecurity; rapid change; great diversity; and a lack of solid traditions. This led to a sense of individualism over collectivism (Jurkiewicz and Brown, 1998). Influenced greatly by seeing their parents laid off, they are cynical and untrusting (Kupperschmidt, 2000). They have feelings of pragmatism, alienation and cynicism (Sirias and Karp, 2007). This generation is considered poor at networking and somewhat skeptical of authority (Crumpacker and Crumpacker, 2007). Many of the viewpoints this generation has towards authority, corporations and work-life balance have to do with the breakdown of institutions such as marriage and with the corporate downsizing that most likely affected one or both of their parents (Patota, Schwartz, and Schwartz, 2007).

Generation- Y

The young group of managers and potential managers in the workforce today is much different than the previous two generations – they crave for higher salaries and flexible work arrangements (Jennings, 2000). One of the strongest traits or viewpoints of Generation- X employees is the importance of work-life balance (Johnson and Lopes, 2008). Also, because these individuals are assumed to be more independent and disloyal, they are considered more likely to switch jobs in order to improve skills for the next opportunity (Johnson and Lopes, 2008). This Millennial generation is said to be the first to be born into a wired world; they are 'connected' 24 hours a day (Ryan, 2000). Millennials are expected to be the first generation to be socially active since the 1960s (Ryan, 2000). They are blatant, vocal and voice their opinion. They are characterized by a tremendous appetite for work.

| S. No. | Gen X | Gen Y |
|--------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. | Accept Diversity | Celebrate Diversity |
| 2. | Pragmatic/Practical | Optimistic/realistic |
| 3. | Self Reliant/Individualistic | Self-inventive/Individualistic |
| 4. | Reject Rules | Rewrite the rules |
| 5. | Killer Life-Living on the edge | Killer Lifestyle-pursuing luxury |
| 6. | Mistrust Institutions | Irrelevance of institutions |
| 7. | PC | Internet |
| 8. | Use technology | Assume technology |
| 9. | Multitask | Multitask fast |
| 10. | Latch-Key Kids | Nurtured |
| 11. | Friend=Not Family | Friends=Family |

Generation- Y is most talked about recently. They are branded for their sense of entitlement, outspokenness, inability to take criticism, and technological sophistication. *Fortune* deemed Generation- Y in its May 28, 2007, issue the most high-maintenance, yet potentially most high-performing generation in history because its members are entering the workplace with more information, greater technological skill and higher expectations of themselves and others than their predecessors. In addition, *Time* described members of Generation- Y in its July 16, 2007, issue as wanting the kind of life balance where every minute has meaning.

Generational labels are important in the discussion of the changing workforce. For example, we need to understand who is pushing for change and who is criticizing change in order to understand how to create workplace bridges. Each generation approaches work differently and has different needs when learning. Relations among the generations seem to be at a low point. Gen Y thinks Gen X is a bunch of whiners. Gen X sees Gen Y as arrogant and entitled. And everyone thinks the Baby Boomers) are self-absorbed workaholics.

According to Linda Gravett and Robin Throckmorton, authors of *Bridging the Generation Gap*, a lot of generational tension hovers around the use of technology and work ethics. Gravett's research confirmed that 32 percent of Gen X-ers believe that "younger generation" lacks a good work ethic and that this is a problem. 13 percent of Gen Y-ers reiterate that a difference in work ethics across the generations causes friction. They believe they have as good a work ethic as the Gen X-ers, and they are alleged unnecessarily.

Technology is another flashpoint. In a survey conducted for job site CareerBuilder.com in 2007, around 50 percent of the respondents noted Generation- Y's preference to communicate via blogs, IMs and text messages, rather than on the phone or face to face, methods preferred by the Generation- X. Technologically facilitated communication can feel abrupt and easily be misunderstood Gen X-ers.

The purpose of this writing is to explore possible differences among the generations by investigating work values and beliefs. This poses a serious research question: Are there generational differences in work commitment?

Work Commitment Constructs

Work Commitment describes different facets of employee attitudes and psychological attachments within the realm of work (Blau, Paul St-John, 1993; Hackett, Lapierre and Hausdorf, 2001; Randall and Cote, 1991). Several constructs have been defined within work commitments theory, with each construct distinguished by the focus of commitment, for example, work, job, organization, profession, supervisor, team (Porter & Steers Methodology, 1982; Reichers, 1985). In this study, we examined generational differences for the five types of commitment.

Work involvement: Work involvement is a normative belief about the value of work in one's life. It refers to

the degree that employees regard work, compared with other activities, as a source of fulfillment for their intrinsic needs (Kane, 1977; Kanungo, 1982a; Kanungo, 1982b).

H1: Gen X employees has higher work involvement than Gen Y employees.

Job Involvement: Job involvement is "the degree to which a job is central to an individual's self-concept or sense of identity" (Frone and Major, 1988) It represents a cognitive state of psychological identification with the job (Lodahl and Kejner, 1965).

H2: Gen X employees has higher job involvement than Generation-Y employees.

Work Group Commitment: Work group commitment is defined as an individual's identification and sense of cohesiveness with other members of their work group (Morrow, 1993; Randall and Cote, 1991).

H3: Gen X employees has higher work group attachment than GenY.

Organizational Commitment: Meyer and Allen's three component view of Organizational Commitment is used in the current study, these three components are-affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. Affective commitment means an employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Employees with a strong affective commitment continue employment with the organization because they *want* to do so. Continuance commitment refers to an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization. Employees whose primary link to the organization is based on continuance commitment remain because they *need* to do so. Finally, normative commitment reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment. Employees with a high level of normative commitment feel that they *ought* to remain with the organization (Meyer and Allen, 1991).

H4a: Gen X employees has a higher affective commitment to organization than GenY.

H4b: Gen X employees has a higher continuance commitment to organization than GenY.

H4c: Gen X employees has a higher normative commitment to organization than GenY.

Professional Commitment: Professional commitment has the same dimensions as organizational commitment.

H5a: Gen X employees has a higher affective commitment to profession than GenY.

H5b: Gen X employees has a higher continuance commitment to profession than GenY.

H5c: Gen X employees has a higher normative commitment to profession than GenY.

3. METHODOLOGY

A total of 250 respondents belonging to Software industry was administered a questionnaire. 125 respondents were typically X-Gen and 125 were Y- Gen employees. 50% of the respondents in both the cases were males and 50% of the respondents were females. The work commitment constructs were measured using a previously validated scale. Work involvement (6 items) and job involvement (10 items) were measured using scales developed by Kanungo (1982). Work Group Commitment (6-items) was measured using Randall and Cote's (1991) scale. Organizational Commitment (Affective, Continuance and Normative) were measured using an 18-item scale developed by Meyer, Allen and Smith (1993).

4. FINDINGS

Results of two-tailed t-tests (pooled variances method) are shown in Table 1. The two generations differed significantly only on three of the nine factors examined ($p < .05$). Only H5b was supported, meaning that Continuance Commitment to the profession is significantly higher for Gen-X than Gen-Y. For Involvement (H2) and Normative Commitment to the Organization (H4c), contrary to the hypotheses, the means were significantly higher for the Gen-Y group of employees than for the Gen-X group.

Table-1:

| Work Commitments | T* Value | Pr> t |
|---|----------|----------|
| H1: Work Involvement {means: Gen-X =20.33; Gen-Y =20.46} | -0.214 | 0.827 |
| H2: Job Involvement (means: Gen-X =32.12; Gen-Y=34.38) | -2.488 | 0.013** |
| H3: Work Group Commitment {means: Gen-X =16.18; Gen-Y=16.81} | -1.774 | 0.075 |
| H4a: Affective Commitment (Organizational) {means: Gen-X =24.14; Gen-Y=24.99} | -1.124 | 0.260 |
| H4b: Continuance Commitment (Organizational) {means: Gen-X =23.95; Gen-Y=22.89} | 1.446 | 0.147 |
| H4c: Normative Commitment (Organizational) {means: Gen-X =21.55; Gen-Y=23.27} | -2.174 | 0.030** |
| H5a: Affective Commitment (Professional) {means: Gen-X =33.72; Gen-Y=33.59} | 0.242 | 0.806 |
| H5b: Continuance Commitment (Professional) {means: Gen-X =27.97; Gen-Y=26.35} | 2.003 | -0.046** |
| H5c: Normative Commitment (Professional) {means: Gen-X =18.03; Gen-Y=18.58} | -0.752 | 0.451 |

**Significant at $P < .05$ (critical value $-1.96 < t^* < 1.96$, $df=379$).

5. DISCUSSION

The study results suggest that contrary to the popularly held belief software professionals from Gen-X and Gen-Y generations appear to be more homogeneous than different in their beliefs about the value of work and commitment to their organizations and the profession. The three work commitment differences that were identified in the study and their possible sources of these differences are as follows:

H2: Gen X employees has higher job involvement than Generation-Y employees. The hypothesis is rejected. Thereby, implying that Generation -Y employees have higher job involvement than Generation- X employees. This makes it safe to interpret that Gen-Y Software professionals consider their jobs a central aspect of their self-concept to a greater extent than Gen-Xers. This finding is quite contrary to expectations based on the typical profiles of these two generations. However, a possible reason for this could be proposed using the life-stage perspective. The younger software workers in Generation- Y may be at a stage in their lives when the job assumes a higher ranking in his list of priorities versus others like marriage and children that may occur later in life. Software professionals are known for delayed marriage and delayed parenthood and hence the job involvement inevitably follows.

H4c: Gen X employees has a higher normative commitment to organization than GenY. This hypothesis is rejected. This can be interpreted as Generation- Y employees possess higher normative commitment to their organizations as compared to X-Geners and feel that they ought to remain with their organization. Normative commitment places emphasis on the employee's beliefs concerning obligations towards their employer. This difference could be due to differences in career stage and tenure. Gen-Y is newer to the organization and the

organization is spending its resources magnanimously in recruitment, training, orienting and motivating the Gen-Y entrant. The Gen-Y employee is cognizant of the organization's efforts and reciprocates the same by demonstrating higher normative commitment to the organization. In addition, because they are in earlier stages of their career, they may have utilized education benefits for advanced degrees more recently. X-Gener on the other hand feels that his/her reciprocal obligations have already been fulfilled over his/her long tenure in the organization. Hence, the psychological contract that is there in the case of Generation- Y is long over and now void for X-Geners and now its time to make a move. Research on psychological contracts suggests that beliefs regarding reciprocal obligations are subject to change over time as an individual perceives that obligations to have been fulfilled (Schambach, 2001). Thus, Gen-Xers who may have received these benefits decades ago may feel a lower sense of indebtedness to their organizations than Gen-Y who received these same benefits more recently. It's the recency of benefits and subsequent higher indebtedness towards the sponsoring organization that creates a bias towards higher normative commitment to organization for Generation –Y employees. Another issue that may have played a role in Generation –Y employees' framing of obligations toward their organization is salary difference between them and their Generation-X counterparts. Owing to the paucity of good software professionals in the early 2000's, many organizations, even those in the public sector offered higher salaries to new hires, creating salary compression (and sometimes salary inversion) between more senior employees and new hires (Janairo, 2000). This led to higher organizational commitment by Gen-Y employees and reduced loyalty by Gen-X employees due to perceived salary inequities.

H5b: Gen X employees has a higher continuance commitment to profession than GenY. The hypothesis is supported. This means that Continuance Commitment to the profession is significantly higher for Gen-X as compared to Gen Y. A plausible reason for this could be the essential difference in values and attitudes between the two groups. Other explanations can also be put forth to rationalize the phenomenon. For example, as tenure increases, the costs of leaving may also escalate. For example, it may involve the forfeiture/reduction of retirement benefits. The social and financial costs of relocating can also increase as individuals and their families become more invested in their communities. During their career progression, software professionals build, develop and maintain competencies that are rather difficult to transfer to another career path (Lee, Yen, Havelka and Koh, 2001). Changing professions can be hard at any stage of life but the return on investment (ROI) potential involved in this type of change would probably lesser for Gen-Xers simply because of their age. Hence, they feel obliged stay in the software profession and hence having a higher continuance commitment to the profession as compared to their Gen Y counterparts. Besides, the Software career accommodates a diversity of career orientations and hence continuing in the profession may not be as restrictive in terms of options as some other professions (Ralston, Egri, Stewart, Terpstra, and Kaicheng, 1999).

6. CONCLUSION

The study shows that a coherent pattern of differences in the work commitments of Gen-X and Gen-Y software professionals is missing. This has implications for both research and practice. Theoretically, it raises a pertinent question- Is age related to work values? Is there any relationship between the concepts of age-cohort generation and work values? The findings of this study suggest that generation is not a sole and good-factor predictor of work values. There are other influencers too like historical events and societal changes. If generation is to be retained as an element in work values theory, it must be moderated to incorporate the effects of other influencers too.

The current generation bands need to be revised for that they appear to be too broad in span to and thus fail the theoretical models in their attempt to propose any explanation. We perhaps need to revisit the concept and propose narrower generation bands. A more appropriate approach would be to study an important historical event in conjunction with an individual's career or life stage. This would incorporate the impact that historical and societal changes cast on an individual's attitudes, values and learning styles. This would compensate for the overdue importance given to generation.

The study has serious implications for practicing managers. The study challenges the traditionally accepted stereotypes on generational differences, which if accepted would prove to be misleading and detrimental to the organization, and suggests appropriate human resource strategies for software professionals. The observations offer a strong word of caution for HR managers who tend to assume an overly simplistic view of the generational differences, thanks to the guidance available in text books and popular press articles. Software professionals are a critical organizational resource and the turnover rate in software industry sometimes assumes a dreaded high leading to an inevitable chaos. It has at many times been the highest in any profession (Oz, 2001). It therefore becomes important to extend our existing knowledge and understanding of the factors that affect the professional and organizational commitments in software professionals. A committed employee has an enduring association with the organization and stays with it in times both good and bad (Meyer and Allen, 1997). Earlier work done in this area has found a positive relationship between employee values and organizational and professional commitment (Oz, 2001). Professional commitment does not only imply retention in the profession but encompasses a vast array of professional behaviors such as subscription to technical and popular journals, memberships of professional associations, attending seminar, conferences, workshops, refresher courses, training programs etc. that are important in profession (Morrow and Wirth, 1999). A dynamic field like software requires regular updating and ongoing learning in the face of constant changes in technology. A key challenge before the firm lies in devising interventions by which it can develop and sustain the organizational and professional commitment of their Software professionals. HR managers who hold generation based stereotypes and hence discount the potential commitment of Gen-Y in their organization may miss opportunities to build upon these employees' initial predisposition for commitment through socialization and training (Zemke, Raines and Filipczak, 1999). Such managers at times may adopt human resource management strategies that are control-based rather than commitment-based, which may not be effective for this group of professionals. This would further lead to perceptions of injustice and create divisiveness in organizations. Literature abounds in evidence of a link between the perceptions of organizational fairness and affective commitment (Meyer, Allen and Smith, 1993). Perceived inequities between Generation-X and Generation -Y could engender a feeling of inequity and lead to a conflict between members of the two generational groups. The study draws sample only from the Software industry and intends to make the HR Managers 'Generationally savvy' advises them to unlearn the popular stereotypical generational differences and create a fresh understanding of the two generations in their workforce. The research illustrates that Gen-X and Generation -Y may actually have more in common than originally anticipated. It's safe to infer that the Gen-Y in this study is as committed to their profession and their organization as their Gen-X counterparts. The paper adds to the emerging evidence that these differences are attributable to other factors (career and stage of life) instead of being an exclusive and true 'generational divide'.

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