

Generational Diversity and Work Values

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Abstract

Work values are a significant factor that impacts employees' job satisfaction and their commitment to work. Understanding generational diversity among employees and using the right strategy to manage them are important for organizational success. Diversity across generations was theorised and applied in Western cultures. This research investigated if generational diversity can be expanded equally to United Arab Emirates workforce. A sample of university employees was surveyed. Employees as a whole identified extrinsic factors such as job security, intrinsic interest, social, and power work values as the most important values. The results revealed that there are no variations in work values. Classification: J53; M54; O15.

Keywords: Generations; Work values; Baby boomers; Generation X; Millennials JEL

Introduction

Recently, the workplace has witnessed dramatic changes due to globalization, technology, demographic changes, and so on. Such diversity in the workforce might influence the way organizations operate. Lately, a number of young workers are joining the workforce to work with or even manage people who are as old as their parents. Most likely, multiple generations, Baby Boomers (Boomers), Generation X (Xers), and Millennials or Generation Y (Yers) are working together side by side. Boomers were born between the years of 1945 and 1964, and Xers were born between 1965 and 1980. Yers are those who were born after 1980 and also called "Dot-Com" Generation [1]. Nowadays, the biggest challenge for management is motivating the workforce, because motivation is not a specific trait [2].

Researchers defined generation as distinguishable individuals who have common characteristics such as birth years, age, location, and historic life events. Such groups tend to develop a collective personality, ideas, and feelings about authority, organization, and behavior [3,4]. A cohort is a group of people who are banded together across generations by sharing similar birth years and experiences [5]. Furthermore, each group shares a set of core values that categorize it, developed during the years representing their generation. The work values of these generations are different in various ways.

Generational Diversity was theorised and applied in Western cultures such as UK, USA and Canada. The current research aims to investigate if generational diversity in work values can be expanded equally to United Arab Emirates (UAE) workforce, specifically within the workforce of Al Ain University of Science and Technology. This paper will focus on Boomers, Xers, and Yers because the workforce at Al Ain University consists of three generations. First, the generations functioning in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) workforce today are defined. Then, a summary is given of previous research findings concerning these age groups and their respective work values.

Literature Review

A. Generations

Generational cohort theory claims that those share similar birth years and experience the same historical events and social changes during their development tend to share common values, attitudes, and beliefs [3-4,6-9].

Events such as wars, critical economic transformations, technological advancements, redistribution of resources, and so on might significantly shape individuals' values differently from those who were born in unlike conditions.

Boomers were born in the postwar baby boom. There seems to be some disagreement in defining exactly when this group begins and ends. Most research studies have identified this group as those born between 1945 and 1964 [1,10]. Boomers are optimistic [3], find interactions with coworkers to be of high importance [11], and highly rate personal improvement and creativity [12,13]. Furthermore, Boomers have very good work values, live to work; financially driven; reluctant to change; willing to share when recognized; but technology is their big problem [14]. Other characteristics of the Boomer generation include working hard out of loyalty, expecting to stay in jobs over the long term, considering self-sacrifice a virtue, and respecting authority [15]. Their work values are well defined by quality, quantity and sacrifice [14].

With Xers, like Boomers, researchers have differed in identifying the cohort. This research identifies Xers as those born during (1965-1980) period [1,16]. Srinivasan [17] described Xers as shadow generation and "slackers" because they leave when hard [18,19]. Xers are realistic, independent, self-supporting, entrepreneurs, good at multitaskers, market savvy, comfortable with technology; less loyal; love fun and enjoy work/personal time balance [14]. Members of this cohort like to solve their problems on their own without asking for help [20]. Others have identified this group as self-centered, self-reliant, and adaptive to change [21]. Xers tend to respond when they feel their collaboration and commitment to the task are valued. At the same time they prefer workplace based rewards rather than money, also they enjoy time off,

flexible work hours and professional training rewards [14]. When it comes to promotions, Xers tend to take them then figure out how they will affect other aspects of their work space [22]. Life quality is important for Xers [23].

The youngest generation of workers, Generation Y, is those born after 1980 [1]. According to Gursoy, et al. [24] Yers were born between 1981 and 2000. Others defined Yers as who were born during (1978-2002) period [25].

Yers have many different names, including Gen Y, Nexters, the Internet Generation, the Echo Boomers [26], Generation Next [27], the MTV Generation [28], and the Dot-Com Generation [16]. Technology plays a significant role in their lives [29]. Yers are digital savvy; talented in using electronic channels; prefer automatic feedback and show mental flexibility [30].

Yers value teamwork and collective action. They display over confidence attitudes and are described as highly socialized [4]. Moreover, Yers work to live; loyal to their boss; question authority; lack good interpersonal skills; quick learners; excellent multitaskers, positive and helpful [14].

B. Work values

Work values are a significant factor that affects employees' job satisfaction and their commitment to work [24,31]. Major differences exist in the workforce values across generations [32]. Understanding employees' values is crucial because employees' attitudes to work are highly influenced by their values [33]. Work values refer to the worth or usefulness employees place on certain outcomes related to work attributes [34]. They form employees' perceptions and preferences that influence employee attitudes and behaviors [35]. Furthermore, work values are the consequence of employees crave and want to achieve through work [36].

Work value differences may occur between generations because work varies with time and because the time difference between generations joining the workforce [37]. Schwartz [38] classified work values into four dimensions: (a) extrinsic, including salary and job guaranty; (b) intrinsic, including individual growth, job interest, autonomy, and creativity; (c) social, including interaction with other employees and contribution to society; and (d) power, or authority and influence. Other research has classified some work values as extrinsic, or the outcome of work the tangible rewards external to employees including status, job guaranty, and payment. Intrinsic work values, in contrast, occur through the process of work-the intangible rewards that reflect the inherent interest in work, intellectual stimulation, and challenge [39]. Other work values include altruistic values such as assisting others, volunteering, and contributing to society; social values in which employees are motivated by the social and affiliated aspects of work, such as making friends and having friendly interactions with others; and freedom-related values, which refers to work-life balance and flexible schedule [13].

Research Methodology

Data for this research were collected from employees working at Al Ain University of Science and Technology in the UAE. Data were collected using a web-based questionnaire. All university employees were sent an e-mail message that contained a link to participate in the current research. In addition to demographic data such as age, gender, and educational level, the questionnaire comprises 22 questions that

measure relevant dimensions of work values. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree was utilized for each item.

A total of 49 people (23%) responded. Among the respondents, 10 (20.4%) were born before 1964 (Boomers), followed by 19 people (38.8%) for Xers, and 20 for Yers (40.8%). A Cronbach's alpha reliability test was conducted. An exploratory factor analysis with the principal component method was conducted to detect scale dimensionality of university employees' work values and investigate the number of underlying factors that explained most of the variance observed in the employees' work values. The value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.72, indicating the sample is adequate for exploratory factor analysis. In addition, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$), which indicates that factor analysis is useful with this dataset.

The exploratory factor analysis revealed that six factors (dimensions) were specified when the 22-item work value measurement model was analyzed. Attributes that showed factor loading was less than 0.4 and attributes with a loading score more than 0.4 that were loaded on more than one factor were excluded from the analysis [40]. After the six factors were specified, they were sorted into the extrinsic, intrinsic, social, and power categories. Then a series of one-way ANOVA was used to explore generational differences in work values among employees at Al Ain University. The following hypothesis will be tested:

H1: Boomers, Xers, and Yers show the same levels of extrinsic, intrinsic, social, and power work values.

When significant differences among generations exist, Tukey honest significant difference (HSD) multiple post-hoc comparisons will be used between each pair of generational groups.

Results and Discussion

Previous studies suggested that generational groups can be distinguished by a set of work values. The current research aimed to investigate generational differences in work values among university employees. Table 1 presents the sample demographic results. A total of 49 people responded. Among the respondents, 40.8% were Generation Y, followed by 38.8% from Generation X, and a relatively smaller number of respondents, 10 people (20.4%), were Boomers. Most of the respondents were male (59.2%). The majority of respondents (77.6%) had Arabic as their first language. A large number of respondents were academics, such that the majority of them held PhDs (Table 1).

Principal component analysis with a varimax rotation was conducted on the 22 items that were used to measure the employees' work values. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy test was 0.720, and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2=584.544$, $df=231$, and $p < 0.00010$) indicated the dataset was appropriate for exploratory factor analysis. A six-factor pattern emerged such that the Eigenvalue for each factor component was greater than 1. The six extracted factors explain 70.3% of the variability of the 22 items. A number of items with factor loadings less than 0.4, as well as those items that loaded in more than one factor, were eliminated.

As shown in Table 2, the correlations between factors are low, which assures discriminant validity of each underlying factor. The six factor dimensions were named and analyzed as follows:

ITEMS		Boomers (%)	Xers (%)	Yers (%)
First language	Arabic	90	68.4	80
	English	10	15.8	5
	Other	0	15.8	15
Gender	Male	100	63.2	35
	Female	0	36.8	65
Work status	Manager	30	10.5	15
	Nonmanager	70	89.5	85
Academic staff	Academic	90	68.4	25
	Nonacademic	10	31.6	75
Education level	PhD	100	57.9	0
	Master	0	21.1	25
	Bachelor or Less	0	21.1	75

Table 1: Demographic information.

Work environment

The first factor was named work environment because this dimension emphasizes the importance of recognition in the workplace and the significance of working independently as well as valuing teamwork. People working in such environments are likely to be creative, which will advance their personal growth and development and help them make contribution to their jobs. This dimension comes under intrinsic work values.

Work-life balance

The second dimension was named work-life balance. This dimension stresses the importance of a lively and fun work environment to motivate employees. In addition to the importance of a work environment that is full of change and variety, employees like to have work hours that are convenient to their lives. People who work in such environments are more productive. This dimension comes under freedom-related values.

Stability

The third dimension was named stability because of its emphasis on working with people who are loyal to their organization, which enhances the feeling of job security among employees. This dimension comes under extrinsic work values because it refers to tangible rewards external to the employees [38].

Social

The fourth dimension was named social. This dimension deals with increasing employee motivation through the social and affiliated aspects of work such as being able to have friendly interactions with peers and superiors. This emphasizes the need to work in a friendly environment with people who are committed to the organization. This dimension comes under social values.

Personal development

The fifth dimension was named personal development because it deals with the intangible aspects of employees' desire to work on tasks and projects that challenge their abilities. In addition, it emphasizes employees' enthusiasm to learn, improve, and develop new knowledge. This dimension comes under intrinsic work values.

Power and status

The last dimension was named power and status because it measures the degree to which employees perceive their jobs bring them authority, influence, control, and respect [38]. It also emphasizes the importance of recognition of employees' achievements, which increases self-esteem and prestige for employees (Table 2).

Factor	Loadings	Eigenvalue	% of variance explained
Work environment		6.904	31.384
Recognition is given for job well done	0.897		
Ability to work independently	0.862		
Environment where teamwork is valued	0.766		
Coworkers respect seniority	0.672		
People go extra mile/exceed expectations	0.658		
Work-life balance		2.377	10.807
Lively and fun environment	0.749		
Environment provides change and variety	0.685		
Convenient work hours	0.662		
Stability		2.014	9.156
Environment where people are loyal to organization	0.667		
Assurance of job security	0.662		
Social		1.706	7.756
Environment where rules can be challenged	0.846		
People are committed to the organization	0.802		
Friendly coworkers	0.584		
Personal development		1.348	6.127
Tasks and projects that challenge one's abilities	0.786		
Opportunity to learn and develop new knowledge	0.75		
Power and status		1.112	5.053
People influence organizational outcomes	0.912		
Individual achievements are recognized	0.732		

Table 2: The results of the principal component factor analysis.

H1 investigated differences among the three generations' work values. The results in Table 3 reveal no significant differences in work value dimensions for the generation groups of university employees regarding work environment (F=2.12, p=0.132), work-life balance (F=0.112, p=0.895), stability (F=0.83, p=0.442), social (F=0.626, p=0.539), personal development (F=1.869, p=0.166), and power and status (F=0.022, p=0.97). Hence, H1 was not supported and there were no differences between generations on work values. Tukey HSD multiple post-hoc comparisons between each pair of generational groups will not be performed because the ANOVA was insignificant and H1 was not supported. In their study, Yu and Miller (2003) reached similar conclusions that generational differences do not apply to the generational workers in the Taiwan education sector (Table 3). On the other hand, Kayacan, et al. [31] findings revealed that Xers are influenced by intrinsic values like effectiveness, independence, moral values, autonomy, use of capabilities, responsibility, creativity and success than Yers among Turkish university employees.

Factor	Generations	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Work environment	Boomers	4.2	1.22	2.12	0.132
	Xers	4.33	0.781		
	Yers	4.72	0.263		
Work-life balance	Boomers	3.9	0.545	0.112	0.895
	Xers	3.96	0.874		
	Yers	3.85	0.729		
Stability	Boomers	3.9	0.568	0.83	0.442
	Xers	3.58	0.99		
	Yers	3.88	0.705		
Social	Boomers	2.93	0.813	0.626	0.539
	Xers	3.32	1.02		
	Yers	3.22	0.756		
Self-enhancement	Boomers	3.4	0.775	1.869	0.166
	Xers	3.79	0.962		
	Yers	4	0.628		
Power and status	Boomers	3.9	0.876	0.022	0.97
	Xers	3.84	1.01		
	Yers	3.9	0.911		

Table 3: One way ANOVA output.

Limitations and Further Research

Previous research has determined significant differences between Boomers, Xers, and Yers in terms of work values and work attitude. However, the majority of previous research applied to Western culture. National culture plays a significant role in determining people's values, and these values will be carried to the workplace [16]. Applying this research to the UAE workforce might result in limiting the applicability of Western research to generational groups in Arabic cultures. Furthermore, individuals in the Arabic culture are exposed to interact

with people from different ages because of big families which might influence their values.

This research was applied to employees at a university, where employees are most likely enthusiastic to learn; improve; and develop new knowledge, power, and prestige. According to Yu, et al. [16] those who work in the education sector put a high value on social recognition, personal development, and career autonomy over their own time as they manage their working hours and career involvement by establishing relationships with students and personnel.

Future research could focus on generational differences in other work environments such as financial environment and industrial environment. Another limitation is that this research used a cross-sectional research design, with data on university employees of different ages collected at a single point in time. However, a longitudinal research design might be helpful to investigate if there are generational differences in work values within the UAE workforce and if these work values vary as employees become older. This also will help determine if values change or vary over time [32].

Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate whether we can find generational differences in work values among university employees in the UAE. Previous studies applied to Western culture suggested that generational groups can be distinguished by a set of work values. The findings showed that employees as a whole identified extrinsic values such as job security and intrinsic interests such as personal development, career autonomy, social recognition, power, and influence as the most important values. However, the results of this study showed that there are no generational differences in work values among university employees.

Despite the research results and limitations, the workforce is composed of multiple generations who have different values and attitudes toward work. Understanding the impact of generational differences on management and creating an atmosphere of harmony, mutual respect, and combined effort are significant factors for organizational success. A better understanding of the differences and similarities among the various generations in today's workforce could help managers make more informed decisions about human resource policies and practices.

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