

## MANAGING THE DIVERSITY OF GEN X AND GEN Y WORKFORCE FOR CROSS FERTILISED KNOWLEDGE BASE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN TRICHIRAPPALLI

J. SUBBU LAKSHMI<sup>1</sup> & P. S. VASANTHA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Management Studies, Shrimati Indira Ganhi Colleg, Trichy,  
Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>2</sup>Head, Department of Management Studies, Shrimati Indira Ganhi College, Trichy, Tamil Nadu, India

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify generational differences in the behavioral patterns of employees in hospitality industry in Trichy. The study also intends to identify the management styles that can be utilized to increase employee morale and productivity while enhancing recruitment and retention rates of highly qualified workers. Data for this study were collected through a series of discussions. Findings indicated significant generational differences in world views, attitudes toward authority and perspectives on work. Findings suggested Gen Y-ers expect immediate recognition through title, praise, promotion, and pay. They also want a life outside of work—they are not likely to sacrifice theirs for the company. They also believe in collective action, with optimism of the future, and trust in splintered authority and collective responsibility. They like teamwork, showing a strong will to get things done with a great spirit. Gen X-ers are well – based, consistent but more restrained.

**KEYWORDS:** Generational Differences, Human Resource Management, Hospitality Workforce, Work Values

### INTRODUCTION

For the first time in the history of the modern workforce, employees from so many different generations are working and closely both with people who are as young as their children and as old as their parents (Zemke et al., 2000). Managers are realizing that age has just as much to do with employees' hopes, learning styles and expectations as do culture, gender and other characteristics. By understanding each generation and by giving employees what they need to thrive, leaders can do more to increase productivity, morale and employee retention (Kogan, 2007). Merit is replacing longevity in the deciding factors that contribute to promotion. People from very distinct generations are competing for leadership positions in the workplace (Raines, 1997). Generation X and Millennial Generation employees compete for the same jobs and often younger generations get them. Sometimes, because of the post-industrial info-centered work world, the person in charge may be younger than those he or she manages.

In the past, multiple generations had worked in the same organization, but they were usually separated from each other by virtue of their job descriptions and hierarchy. Middle-aged employees tended to be in middle management, and younger workers were everywhere else. Their contacts were mostly with their peers or one level up, with their supervisor (Kogan, 2007). Generational mixing was rare, or significantly structured by formality and protocol. When veteran employees made decisions, they were handed down and communicated to the younger workers through the line supervisor.

There was no sharing of how decisions were made, the strategy behind the order, or for that matter, any requests for input or feedback (Martin and Tulgan, 2002).

The management style was based on a top-down bureaucratic approach (Hogan et al., 1994). The top-down management and leadership practices were largely influenced by the feudalism paradigm (Barker, 1997), which describes leaders at the top of the hierarchy where they direct and control all activities of the people working below for them. Studies suggest that this type of leadership mainly originated from a bureaucratic framework, which is more appropriate for the Industrial Age (Gronn, 2002).

The most important element of the bureaucratic framework is the traditional assumption that control must be rationalized. As a result, the bureaucratic management and leadership style were developed around the idea that goals are rationally conceived and, therefore, managerial practices should be structured to achieve those goals (Barnard, 1938; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). In this approach, organizational success or failure can be explained by actual managers' attributes (Ogaard et al., 2007). This model centers on issues such as motivating workers toward task objectives (House and Mitchell, 1974), leading them to produce efficiently and effectively (Zaccaro and Klimoski, 2001) and inspiring them to align with and commit to organizational goals (Bass, 1985; Zaccaro and Klimoski, 2001).

In the past, many hospitality companies utilized the principles of top-down bureaucratic management and leadership framework which resulted in cost-driven human resource policies where employees were treated as another resource to be deployed to achieve organizational goals (Lucas and Deery, 2004). It is true that, like other resources, human resources should be utilized as effectively and as efficiently as possible to reach organizational goals; but management has to remember that employees should be treated as human with feelings, aspirations, personal goals and priorities in life, the need for self-fulfillment and satisfaction, and the potential for development (Lucas and Deery, 2004; Ross, 1994; Ogaard et al., 2007). Studies suggest that large parts of the hospitality industry use traditional management and leadership styles (Mok et al., 1998; Pittaway et al., 1998; Tracey and Hinkin, 1994, 1996). While managers in some of the hotels appreciate the value of participative leadership, they are inclined to utilize a more authoritative style due to difficulties associated with the participative leadership style (Worsfold, 1989).

However, in recent years, significant changes have taken place in the workplace. Major hospitality companies such as holiday inns, resorts, hotels, drive – ins restaurants etc., recognize that human capital and resources are significantly different than other resources a company has. They are realizing that resource-based and value-added policies are essential to achieve the delivery of high service quality and customer care. That is why they are developing programs and policies to create a work environment that enables employees to have a satisfactory experience at work, good relationships with their superiors and peers, and a fair reward for the effort they have contributed (Ogaard et al., 2007).

While hospitality companies are slowly changing their management practices, labor force demographics are also changing. These changes and employees from several different generations working together are having both positive and negative impacts on employee retention, morale and company profitability (Gordon and Steele, 2005). One of the most important and unique benefits of generational blending is creativity. People who come together from different perspectives always have the potential to bring different thoughts and ideas to problem solving. The potential for positive creative synergy is immense. However, the generational blending and integration is also creating intergenerational problems in the workplace due to generational differences in values, worldviews, ways of working, ways of talking, thinking, even dressing in the workplace (Raines, 2003).

These generational differences are likely to create further conflicts in the workplace by dividing the workforce into an “us vs. them” mentality (Leadership Advantage, n.d.; Yang and Guy, 2006). In a workplace that requires collaboration and cooperation among workers from different generations to deliver the best possible service to customers, generational conflict among workers, combined with a top-down bureaucratic management approach, is likely to adversely influence service delivery. Thus, the interdependent nature of the hospitality industry cannot succeed with the underlying tension of intergenerational conflict in the workplace. The need for understanding differences and overcoming them is crucial in creating positive and fruitful working conditions that are likely to enable hospitality industry leaders to attract and retain workers that will ensure and improve the quality of service delivery and productivity (Ross and Boles, 1994).

Development of effective and efficient workplace strategies and management practices requires a thorough understanding of workforce needs and wants. To manage a very diverse workforce, hospitality leaders must try to understand the mindsets of different generations, and how each group sees the world based on its experiences (Zemke et al., 2000). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine similarities and differences in the goals, expectations, worldviews, work philosophies and values of each generation of hospitality employees and managers.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Generations and Work Values**

One of the factors that is likely to significantly influence employee’s job satisfaction and their commitment to work is their work values. Chu (2007) argues that understanding employees’ values is of vital importance because the degree to which employees value their job influences their attitudes towards work. White (2006) suggests that values have cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions that are closely linked to motivation and satisfaction. Several studies reported that values are likely to have significant influence over a variety of attitudes and behaviors (Brown, 2002; Chu, 2007). Work values have also been related to hospitality job burnout (Kim et al., 2007), organizational commitment (Elizur and Koslowsky, 2001; Ogaard et al., 2007; Ross and Boles, 1994) and showing initiative in one’s work (Pizam et al., 1980).

Most of the research on work values have been centered around three main areas: definition of the components of the work value domain and testing of the structure of that domain (Bolton, 1980; Hendrix and Super, 1968; Neumann and Neumann, 1983); the examination of the relationship between work values and other personal, social and organizational variables (Judge and Bretz, 1992; Ladkin, 1999; Lee et al., 2000; Meglino et al., 1989); and the impact of culture on work values (Chu, 2007; Elizur et al., 1991; Mok et al., 1998; Pizam, 1993; White, 2006). Since employees from the same generation are likely to share similar norms, it is likely that their work value and their attitudes toward work are likely to be influenced by the generation they belong to, which suggests that changes are likely to occur in the structure of work value domain from generation to generation.

### **Generational Categories**

Researchers and social scientists, who study the effects of population on society, use the term “generation” to refer to people born in the same general time span who share key historical or social life experiences (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002). The effects of those key life experiences tend to be relatively stable over the course of their lives (Smola and Sutton, 2002). Due to these distinct key life experiences, each generation develops a unique personality that determines its feelings toward authority and organization (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002). For example, members of generations who come of age in lean times or war years tend to think and act differently than

those born and raised in peace and abundance. The generational personality is also likely to determine what individuals want from work, what kind of workplace environment they desire and how they plan to satisfy those wants and desires. Due to generational differences, these wants and desires tend to vary from generation to generation. Therefore, people from different generations may have problems understanding others' perspectives of the work, which can be stressful, confusing, and frustrating in a demanding workplace like the hospitality industry (Zvikaite-Rotting, 2007).

Several researchers have labeled the generations of the 20th century (e.g., Smola and Sutton, 2002). Even though classifications of generations and the time span used have been inconsistent, behavioral sociologists suggest that each generation lasts approximately two decades, after which it fades into the background as the next generation comes into its own (Schaeffer, 2000; Shepard, 2004).

This study mainly focuses on generations Generation X (Gen X-ers) and the Millennial Generation are the Generations Y or the Next generation.

### **Generation X (1961–80)**

They were born into a rapidly changing social climate and economic recession. They grew up in two-career families with rising divorce rates, downsizing, the dawning of the high-tech age and the information age.

### **Generation Y (1981–2000)**

They represent the current high-tech, neo-optimistic times. Although being the youngest workers, they represent the most technologically adept. They are fast learners and tend to be impatient (Zemke et al., 2000).

## **METHODS**

In order to examine generational similarities and differences among hospitality employees and managers, a series of focus group discussions were conducted on employees of mid- to upper-scale full service hotels, restaurants and holiday resorts.

## **RESULTS**

In-depth focus group discussions revealed the characteristics that define each generation and differences among those generations. Perhaps the biggest difference in the world views of these generations were their differing attitudes toward authority and the perceived importance of work in their lives. In the workplace, the differing attitudes toward authority showed up in either accepting or questioning, or even rebelling, against traditional viewpoints and orders handed down from above. The perceived importance of work in their lives influenced how seriously they take the work and how much time they are willing to spend in the workplace.

### **Characteristics of the Generation X**

- Respond to instant gratification
- Work to live
- Identify with the lone ranger
- Friends in high places

### **Characteristics of the Millennials Generation**

- The more the merrier
- Rules are made to be broken
- Here today and gone tomorrow
- Show me the way

Indicated that Gen X-ers like being the star of the show and getting credit for everything perceived as positive in the workplace. They tend to have big vision for their departments and for the company. They are willing to share vision with everyone as long as they get the recognition. They are willing to support proposals and ideas that are in line with their vision. They tend to be very positive, sometimes to the point of overconfidence and exuberance. They like important, seemingly risky projects. However, when a risky project falters, they are likely to look for someone else to blame for the failure.

They are tough to teach new tricks. They are happy to abide by the rules and very resistant to change because they tend to be comfortable with the way they have always done things. They tend to be very detail oriented and prefer hands-on experiences. However, they are not good at multitasking. They have never developed multitasking skills because they did not need them growing up. They tend to view younger staffers as scattered and inattentive to detail.

Technology is a big issue for them. They are not technologically (tech) savvy. They do not like computers. As some of them suggested, “my computer is out to get me.” Another one indicated that “It is a personal daily war with my computer.” If they are asked to perform something different or new, they require very detailed specific directions.

They enjoy and want personal gratification. Motivational messages such as: “You’re important to our success”, “your contribution is unique and important to us” or “We need you” are likely to go a long way with them.

### **Generation X**

They expect immediate recognition through title, praise, promotions and pay. If there is a problem, they want to solve the problem immediately. Even if all the problems are solved immediately, it is hard to make them happy. They tend to complain about everything. The best work environment for them is the one that is fun, keeps them busy, but not too busy, so that they can do fun things while working. They also want everyone, including their supervisors and managers, to be direct with them.

They work to live. Their job provides the means to enjoy their life. Their life outside of work is very important for them. They are not likely to sacrifice their life for the company. They want to work as many hours as they have to, not a minute longer because they want to go home and play. They learned from their parents’ experience that going by the company rules is not likely to guarantee their job. Their philosophy is “Leave work at work.” They try very hard to strike a good balance in their lives. For that reason, professions requiring overtime or varied shifts do not match up well with their desire to work steady shifts, avoid long hours, and keep work and personal lives separate. In addition, they have very low tolerance for bureaucracy and rules, especially regarding time and attendance.

They tend to prefer companies that offer flexible schedules, independence, professional growth, mentors, interesting work and time off. They expect more from the company they work for such as free workout facilities, free

childcare facilities, and free meals.

Findings also indicated that they are very self-reliant, and often choose to be seen as self-sufficient. They work better in isolation. They are not into teams or meetings. They sometimes lack interpersonal skills. However, they are very tech savvy, and they have great respect for technology. The best work environment for them is one that provides the latest technology, and leaves them alone to do their work, because they like to be in charge of their own actions. Since they are good at multi-tasking, they like to work on simultaneous projects as long as the company lets them prioritize the projects.

They tend to distrust big institutions and assume that every job is temporary, every job is a stepping stone. They are not very loyal to any particular company. They are very skeptical, self-focused and self-protective at work (Adams, 2000). However, they expect opportunities for learning on the job so they can get promotions they desire or find a better job somewhere else. They have little patience or respect for the ignorant or those unwilling to learn.

X-ers tend to like having friends in high places so that they can participate in developing goals and even in strategic planning because they believe they are very smart. They like communicating directly with the upper management. They have no problem questioning authority. They both expect and demand change. If they do not get what they want, they have no problem looking for a new job.

### **Millennial Generation**

Unlike the X-ers, the Millennials tend to believe in collective action, are optimistic about the future, and trust centralized authority. Although they have not been in the workplace for long, they are already showing a strong will to get things done with great spirit. They are great collaborators and favor teamwork. This might be due to having functioned in groups in school, organized sports and extracurricular activities from a very young age; but they are also very independent, self-confident and self-expressive. They like to be recognized and respected because they believe that they put so much of themselves into their work. They expect their supervisors and managers to, at least, know their names and acknowledge their good work. This generation believes managers should try to get to know everyone and give personal attention to each employee.

Even though the Millennials believe in collective action, they have a tendency to question every rule because they believe rules are made to be broken. They simply reject the notion that they have to stay within the rigid confines of a job description. They are likely to challenge workplace norms such as dress codes, inflexibility of the standard workday and employee-supervisor relations.

Since they are the first generation to grow up with the Internet, they take electronic collaboration for granted. Like X-ers, they like working with the latest technology. Having grown up in the video age, wielding a remote control and clicking a mouse, they assimilate information quickly and can focus on many things at once. They are even better at multitasking than the X-ers.

The biggest problem Millennials are having in the workplace is that they believe that no one respects and appreciates them because they are young. During the focus group discussions, one of the Millennials suggested that ‘employees will work harder if they know their hard work is being recognized.’ Millennials tend to believe that they do not get the treatment they deserve from many of the older co-workers and managers. That makes them upset.

Findings suggested that the Millennials are in search of role models. They value professional development and

seek mentors to show them the ropes. They are eager to learn and enjoy questioning things. They are very confident and have high self-esteem. They are motivated by similar incentives like previous generations, but seek more direction. They tend to work best when there is personal contact, strong leadership, and direction.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

### **Strategies for Bridging the Generation Gap**

With looming retirements of Gen X, it will be increasingly important for organizations to attract and retain quality employees. The hospitality industry is no exception. To do so, the hospitality industry will need to develop new standards of human resource management in order to successfully connect with a multi generational workforce. It is possible that a top-down and bureaucratic management and leadership style may not be effective with younger generations of employees. Workplace policies and leadership approaches may need to become flexible in addressing issues related to inclusiveness, recognition and alignment of generational values of workers in order to create greater work-life balance (Deloitte, 2006). A key to bridging the generation gap is the ability of hospitality leaders to create a supportive work environment for an increasingly diverse population of workers.

Bridging the generation gap requires acknowledging that everyone is different. Everyone's unique experiences, backgrounds, culture, etc. are likely to influence their attitudes toward work. These differences may have positive or negative consequences for a company. Generational differences are likely to be a source of frustration for leaders if they see those differences as potential problem areas. Hospitality leaders need to understand that everyone has something good to offer and they may bring something better to the table if they are given a chance. That is why if the leaders learn to appreciate those differences by focusing on positive attributes and take time to consider the strengths each co-worker brings to the workplace, they are likely to manage those differences effectively and create a positive work environment. This positive dialogue bonds the participants in movement forward, celebrating their past successes and unifying their vision of the future while rebuilding their daily activities to be more closely aligned with their mutually discovered possibilities (Mann, 2006).

A useful leadership tool capable of stimulating positive dialogue and bridging generational groupings might be Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry offers a new way of dealing with organizational development by nurturing positive employee-centered dialogue over deficit-based thinking and problem-solving processes. It benefits an organization by bridging diversity and facilitating the alignment of organizational goals (vision) and the human needs (social actors) within the system. This inquiry and dialogue process can promote the unification of divergent generational interests of social actors within the organization (Cooperrider et al., 2003). Application of the principles of positive inquiry may lower the tensions caused by the divergent generational interests that can result in political infighting, formation of power alliances and increased turnover.

### **Recommended Strategies for Generation Y-ers to Manage Gen X - ers**

More and more X-ers are moving into managerial positions where they frequently manage employees from older generations. It is crucial for companies to provide adequate training for the Gen X managers on how to deal with employees from older generations. Such training may lower tensions in the workplace by teaching younger managers critical supervisory skills. The training should also suggest techniques for handling multigenerational issues and problems. These training sessions should especially focus on how to show respect to the experiences of older employees. To make older employees feel more important and to gain their experiences, the Gen X managers should acknowledge that they

have less experience and can learn from older employees. The Gen X managers should be encouraged to seek out more experienced employees, seeking their input and advice. This strategy will not only make older employees feel more valued, but it will also help the Gen X managers to improve their knowledge and skills. The Gen X managers should understand that older generations are not very tech savvy; and find e-mail or voice mail too impersonal, preferring instead to speak face to face.

Another important issue when dealing with older generations is the amount of attention they receive. When dealing with Gen X managers should give their full attention. Multi-tasking may help the Gen X managers accomplish a lot during the day. However, Gen X manager is writing an e-mail while the two are talking. Giving full attention actually may be beneficial in the long run because it may give the impression to older employees that their younger managers are really interested in what they have to say. This may result in gaining the respect of older employees.

### **Recommended Strategies to Manage Millennial Generation**

Even though the Generation X and Millennial Generation have some similarities, they are also significantly different. The Millennials tend to “hang” with people from their own generation. They may look like kids on the corner, which may be seen as immaturity by some of the managers and supervisor (Armour, 2005). As indicated earlier, one of the complaints the Millennials have is that everyone sees them as the “kids.” Regardless of how they may seem when interacting with co-workers from their own generation, managers and supervisors should treat them with respect, embracing their fresh perspectives. To make Millennials feel important and part of the team, managers and supervisors should ask them their opinions. They love to collaborate and be team players. They tend to respond less enthusiastically to an autocratic manager. Millennials have no problem with managers challenging them. In fact, they like challenges because they like working on things that really matter. One of the best ways of motivating them might be offering more responsibility as a reward for their accomplishments (Tulgan, 2003).

Establishing a mentor–mentee relationship between these two groups may be beneficial to both generations and may enable companies to lower generational tensions in the workplace. Because Millennials desire to improve their skills and their knowledge. These are likely to make the Millennials very loyal to the company while improving their perceptions of how much the company values them.

Leaders should also understand that some of the Millennial employees are likely to lack good interpersonal skills. They may need help and guidance improving their Interpersonal skills. One way of dealing with this issue may be offering opportunities for them to socialize with other employees. To make them part of the team and help them improve their social skills, companies can organize outing events such as picnics, going to a sporting event or a dinner outing. These events are likely to help the Millennials to feel like they are part of a bigger family, which is likely to make them very loyal to the company.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The purpose of this study was to examine generational differences and similarities among hospitality employees and managers in order to develop leadership strategies to increase employee morale and productivity. Using the information in-depth focus group discussions from employees of hotel and restaurants in Tiruchirappalli similarities and differences were identified. Findings suggested that the collected things Generation X-ers work to live. They want immediate recognition through title, praise, promotion, and pay. They also want a life outside of work—they are not likely



to sacrifice theirs for the company.

The Millennials believe in collective action, are optimistic, and trust decentralized authority. They like teamwork, showing a strong will to get things done with great spirit. Clearly, the current study is just one step towards a thorough understanding of generational differences and similarities among hospitality employees and managers. Identification of generational issues is likely to result in development of leadership strategies that increase employee morale and productivity by lowering workplace tensions and generational conflicts in the workplace. Therefore, this study holds the potential for helping companies and managers to better understand generational issues in the workplace. In addition, the results of the study will, hope fully, serve as a base for more comprehensive research.

