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Motivation, work values, organisational commitment and job satisfaction : age and generational cohort effects.

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Abstract

Since the year 2000, younger workers born after 1980 have been entering the South African workforce in large numbers. The experienced Baby Boomer generation, born between 1945 and 1964 has started leaving the workplace in retirement. With organisations currently facing the challenge of skills shortages in some professions/trades, it is important for organisations to recognise the potential influence of work values on attitudes and behaviours at work in order to retain staff and groom future leaders. Different Generations are assumed to bring their own norms and values into the work place and an understanding of what motivates these different generations will ensure that organisations better plan retention strategies. As South Africa receives the latest generation of workers (Generation Y) into the work force, managers need to be encouraged to deal with the potential generational differences among workers. The purpose of this quantitative study was to research and examine the relationship between age, sources of motivation, work values, organisational commitment and job satisfaction across generations in the South African work force. A research model was developed to test theory on generational differences. Cohort membership was hypothesised to influence motivation, work values, organisational commitment and job satisfaction. Work values and sources of motivation were also hypothesised to influence organisational commitment and job satisfaction. A quantitative study was conducted to investigate the association between age (which represented cohort membership) and sources of motivation, work values, organisational commitment and job satisfaction. The study was designed to answer the main question: Are there significant differences in sources of motivation, work values, organisational commitment and job satisfaction across the three generations found in the South African workforce today? Data were collected using both an on line and hard copy questionnaire distributed to corporate companies that participate in career exhibitions at the University of the Witwatersrand. Data were analysed using SPSS software version 19 and 20.The findings largely confirm previous findings which suggest that there are significant differences between generations in sources of motivation, work values, organisational commitment and job satisfaction. Consistent with research, older workers, Baby Boomers were found to have higher job satisfaction than younger workers. An interesting finding of this study was that contrary to research literature, younger workers, generation Y, were found to have higher organisational commitment than Baby Boomers and generation X.

Consistent with previous studies, Baby Boomers were found to have higher levels intrinsic work values than both generation X and Y. The results indicate that there are differences between generations and this has implications for Human Resource practitioners and researchers. Based on the findings of this research, further research is warranted specifically in understanding organisational commitment across generations.

Keywords:

Generation Differences, Cohorts, Age effects, Generational characteristics, Period effects, Attitude, Organisational commitment, Job satisfaction, Work values, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y.