

The Mismatch between Individual Values and Organizational Values among Different Generations in the Workplace

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Abstract: Different generations of employees have different characteristics and values that make them unique. Currently, there are four generations of employees at the workplace: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Millennials and Generation Z employees are said to be less loyal. The question is whether the incompatibility of their values and those of the organization makes them less faithful to their organization warrants further investigation. Therefore, the study's objective is to investigate the mismatch between individual values and those of the organization among different generations in the workplace. A focus group discussion (FGD) involving representatives from public and private organizations was organized. The input from the FGD was analyzed using content analysis, and the findings indicate that Millennial and Generation Z employees have differing values that should be given considerable attention by management, which is mainly represented by Generation X. Managerial and research implications are provided in the paper.

Keywords: *Millennials, Generation Z, value congruent, work culture*

1. Introduction and Background

Currently, the workforce in the organization can be categorized into four groups: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. These groups of employees have unique characteristics. Research has identified common trends and characteristics associated with different generations. For example, traditionalists are often characterized by strong work ethics and loyalty (Barwińska-Małajowicz, 2022); Baby Boomers focus on career advancement (Altman et al., 2020); Generation X have a desire for work-life balance; Millennials prefer meaningful work (Pasla et al., 2021); and Generation Z is strongly inclined towards technology and social responsibility (Ho et al., 2022).

Numerous studies have investigated generational differences, including characteristics, values, and preferences. These studies can be grouped into a few categories based on their focus. The first category is workplace preferences, including factors like leadership styles, communication preferences, and attitudes toward work. In general, younger generations may prefer more collaborative and inclusive leadership styles, while older generations may be accustomed to hierarchical structures (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022).

The second category of studies focused on technology adoption and usage. Younger generations, such as Millennials and Generation Z, are typically more comfortable with and reliant on technology, influencing their expectations for digital tools and communication in the workplace (Bredbenner, 2020). Older generations of employees are less technology savvy and risk-avoidant. They are always tagged as old school and prefer conventional work methods, including interaction and communication (McVey, 2022).

The third category of studies delves into the motivations and priorities that drive career decisions across generations. Factors such as job security, career advancement, work-life balance, and social impact are often examined to understand the varied preferences of different age groups. Newer employees prefer work-life balance and social impact, while older generations prefer job security and career advancement (Serviss, 2020).

The fourth category of studies investigates the level of organizational loyalty exhibited by different generations. Younger generations may be more prone to changing jobs for career growth, while older generations may value long-term commitment and stability (Ackerman & Kanfer, 2020). Younger generations keep searching for

career growth opportunities in the job market (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). That is why many Millennials and Generation Z employees move from one organization to another just for greener pastures.

The fifth category of research explores how the values of different generations contribute to the overall organizational culture. Not only that, but different generations might also create workplace conflict because of their differences (Rahim & Katz, 2020). Top management is represented by those from older generations and executives, and younger generations represent below-job positions. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for creating inclusive environments accommodating diverse perspectives and preferences.

Although there are abundant studies on generational differences, future research efforts must address gaps in the research. Many studies generalize generational traits, overlooking the considerable diversity within each generation (Rudolph, 2021). There is a need for more nuanced research that considers individual differences, cultural influences, and other factors that shape values within generational cohorts.

Limited attention has been given to intersectionality, which considers the overlapping effects of multiple social categories, such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status, alongside generational differences (Holman & Walker, 2021). Research should explore how these factors intersect and influence values in the workplace. In addition, many studies are conducted in specific cultural contexts, and findings may not be universally applicable (Durlak et al., 2022). More research is needed to understand how generational values manifest in diverse cultural settings and how organizational values may need to adapt accordingly.

Values are not static; they can change over time and in response to changing circumstances. Research should delve into the dynamic nature of generational values and how they adapt to shifting societal, economic, and technological landscapes (Miller, 2023). While there is research on the values of different generations, there is limited understanding of how organizations can effectively adapt and align their cultures to accommodate diverse values. Further exploration is needed in organizational strategies for managing generational differences.

Therefore, the present study used an exploratory research design to examine the mismatch between individual and organizational values among various generations of the workforce. The findings are expected to answer the existing research questions about different characteristics, expectations, attitudes, and other aspects of jobs. The findings of the present study provide some solutions to the problem that management can use to resolve conflicts among different generations of workers.

2. Literature Review

Previous studies have outlined some of the differing characteristics of different generations in the workplace. Traditionalists are said to have strong work ethics and loyalty (Barwińska-Małajowicz, 2022). Baby Boomers focus on career advancement (Altman et al., 2020). Generation X prefers work-life balance. Millennials demand meaningful work (Pasla et al., 2021). Generation Z employees strongly favor technology and social responsibility (Ho et al., 2022).

Those from older generations represent top management of the organization, and executives and below-job positions are represented by younger generations. This disparity could create conflict in the organization, involving different generations of the workforce (Rahim & Katz, 2020). The older generations have developed organizational values based on their values and expectations. When the younger generations of the workforce enter employment, they bring along their values, expectations, and preferences that differ from the values of the organizations. This scenario creates a mismatch between organizational and generational values that warrants further investigation.

Based on existing work on generational differences in the workplace, the present study aims to investigate the differences between individual and organizational values among different generations and propose potential solutions to the problem.

The mismatch between individual values and organizational values

The mismatch between individual and organizational values can be categorized into a few themes to facilitate discussion and understanding. This categorization is based on existing research on generational differences and includes work-life balance, communication style, approach to authority, technological proficiency, career expectations, and commitment and loyalty.

Work-Life Balance: The attitude toward work-life balance is the first factor differentiating younger and older generations. Younger generations, such as Millennials and Generation Z, may prioritize a better work-life balance and flexible work arrangements (Erkilinç, 2023; Serviss, 2020). This can be perceived as incompatible with traditional organizational values emphasizing long hours and dedication. Most organizations value employees who can follow the standard working hours and are physically present in the designated work area (Taheri et al., 2020). Less flexibility was given to employees until the recent COVID-19 pandemic hit the world.

Communication Styles: The second factor that characterizes employees of different generations is communication styles. Different generations may have distinct preferences in communication styles (Mahmoud et al., 2021). For example, older generations may prefer face-to-face communication, while younger generations may be more comfortable with digital communication (Janssen & Carradini, 2021). Older generations prefer detailed information on the task to be performed, but younger generations expect to be given the freedom to decide on the details of the assigned task (Szymkowiak et al., 2021; Warr, 2020). This difference can sometimes lead to misunderstandings.

Approach to Authority: The third factor differentiating older generations from younger generations of employees is their approach to authority. Younger generations, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, may be more inclined to question authority and seek a flatter organizational structure (Murvanidze, 2020). Older generations give full respect to authority and will not question any instructions from top management. Moreover, they value hierarchical structures as they portray the authority the top management holds. Previous studies acknowledge the existence of conflict among different generations and try to provide potential solutions to this occurrence (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Rudolph et al., 2021).

Technological Proficiency: The fourth factor that separates older generations from younger generations is technological proficiency. Younger generations are often more tech-savvy and comfortable with new technologies and may expect organizations to adopt the latest tools (Bredbenner, 2020; Nawaz, 2020). Gen Z is the most proficient in technology compared to other generations (Basantes Andrade et al., 2020). However, they want the organizations to provide adequate rewards and recognition for their talent (Chopra & Bhilare, 2020). This can clash with organizational values that prefer established processes. Older generations are complacent with the existing ways of doing their work. They normally resist change. This is consistent with the adage that we cannot teach new tricks to old dogs.

Career Expectations: Career expectations are the fifth factor that sets older and younger generations of employees apart. Younger generations may prioritize career development, mentorship, and a sense of purpose in their work (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). Older generations prefer job security and stability, recognition and respect, work-life balance, and retirement planning (Serviss, 2020). If an organization does not align with the younger generations' values, it may struggle to retain and engage younger talent. Past research found that intrinsic and extrinsic factors determine Gen Z's career aspirations and Gen Z has well-defined career expectations and career development plans (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). Organizations must address these gaps if they want to create a harmonious work environment.

Commitment and Loyalty: The final factor contributing to generational differences is commitment and loyalty. Older generations of the workforce place a higher value on long-term commitment and loyalty to the organization. In comparison, younger generations are more inclined to change jobs for career advancement or personal development (Seifert et al., 2023). This will create a mismatch between the organizational values and those of younger workforce generations. The organization must create a suitable strategy to retain young talents from leaving. A study found that employee trust and satisfaction strongly impacted employee organizational commitment, and employee organizational commitment impacted employee loyalty (Azzam & Harsono, 2021).

3. Research Methodology

The research design used is qualitative research involving a focus group discussion (FGD). A few representatives from public and private organizations participated in the FGD. They are the National Archive (Arkib Negara) (1), the National Population and Family Development Board or *Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara* (LPPKN) (2), Employee Provident Funds (EPF) or *Kumpulan Wang Amanah Pekerja* (KWSP) (1), the Credit Counselling and Debt Management Agency or *Agensi Kaunseling dan Pengurusan Kredit* (AKPK) (2), a legal firm (1), a hotel (1) and the People's Trust Council or *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (MARA) (2). Altogether, ten individuals were involved in the FGD.

The FGD occurred at one of the famous hotels in Kuala Lumpur in March 2023, and experienced researchers from Universiti Teknologi MARA and Kolej Universiti Poly-Tech MARA moderated the discussion session. The participants were separated into two groups and asked a few questions about the values of different generations in the workplace, the mismatch between the values of different generations and those of organizations, and the strategies used by your organizations to reduce the mismatches between the generational values and those of the organization. The feedback given by the participants was recorded, transcribed, and presented according to the themes for easy understanding.

The data collected was analyzed using a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis helps identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within this qualitative data. It allows researchers to capture the essence of the discussions, highlighting key issues, concerns, and perspectives participants share. In addition, thematic analysis can effectively represent participants' voices by identifying recurring themes and directly incorporating quotes or specific language used by participants. This ensures the analysis remains grounded in the data and accurately reflects participants' perspectives.

4. Results and Discussion

Work-Life Balance

From the FGD findings, a few insights can be learned concerning work-life balance. When there is a mismatch between the organizational values and those of the individuals, regardless of the generations, employees are likely to take drastic action to resolve the issue. The representative from MARA said, "At that time, we faced a crisis because many teachers asked for an early pension because they could not cope. Teachers are used to traditional methods. When wanting to adopt a new method of learning, stress levels are high, and mental health is worrying. Teachers who are 50 years old and above become uncomfortable".

The participant from MARA also added, "Some also quit their jobs because they did not want to move even though they were allowed to be promoted. But when they were promoted to juniors, they became angry". It shows that younger generations prefer work-life balance, and older generations will also opt for early retirement when they cannot cope with the situation. The finding is consistent with the previous work that work-life balance is crucial for employees regardless of their generation (Erkilinç, 2023; Leslie et al., 2021; Lestari & Margaretha, 2021).

Communication Styles

The findings of the FGD also confirm a difference in communication styles between older and younger generations, aligning with the findings of Janssen and Carradine (2021) and Mahmoud et al. (2021). According to the participant from the National Archive, "Right now, Gen X and Baby Boomers need to adapt like their subordinates. For example, all departmental information must be in infographics to be shared on social media. Gen X and Baby Boomers need to follow Gen Y's lead because they are smarter in this regard. Gen Y is indispensable in this organization because Gen Z is too raw".

Due to differences in communication styles, conflict will arise. The representative from LKKPN said, "When there is a module manufacturing process, there will be a conflict between Gen Y and Gen X. The contradictions that occur are less professional when Gen Y questions why it is necessary to follow the old employees still and can be changed due to the passage of time, but Gen X gives the reason their actions are correct because they are more experienced. It is difficult to agree between Gen Y and Gen X". The findings are consistent with those

highlighted by previous studies (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Leslie et al., 2021)

To further support the finding, the participant from the EPF stated, "The Strategy and Investment Group consists mostly of Gen Y and is managed by Gen X. The situation when entering this group area is always serious and focused. It is less in terms of humanity". Therefore, management must find a way to avoid having conflicts between different generations escalating into more significant problems (Rudolph et al., 2021).

Approach to Authority

Regarding the approach to authority, the staff from the National Archive stated, "Gen Y and Gen Z feel that Baby Boomers and Gen X should manage matters in the organization because they are more mature, and this needs to be overcome." It seems that there is an agreement regarding who should manage the organizations. However, there are some concerns regarding the attitude of the younger generations toward the older generations. He added, "Gen X is more respectful when dealing. The softness in Gen X causes Gen Z and some Gen Y to take advantage of".

To further illustrate the value incompatibility between these generations, the participant from the National Archive added, "It becomes the habit in the organization, showing 'good' in front of superiors only but showing a different attitude behind. This matter needs to be resolved to build good personal relationships". The findings confirm that younger generations, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, may be more inclined to question authority and show less respect to the top management (Murvanidze, 2020). Previous studies acknowledge the existence of conflict among different generations and try to provide potential solutions to this occurrence (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Rudolph et al., 2021).

Technological Proficiency

The findings from the FGD also support the earlier assumption that younger generations are more IT savvy than older generations (Bredbenner, 2020; Nawaz, 2020). Furthermore, older generations are less flexible when learning new technology. This is evident when the representative from MARA said, "When there is a system change, a transition occurs. We accept that many teachers at MRSM have resigned because they are unfamiliar with the new system."

To further support the finding, the participant from the EPF said, "Small branches are directed to close and be converted using the 'account' system. Many are fighting on the grounds of unemployment [because they are reluctant to learn new skills]. EPF is parallel with rescaling and upscaling to ensure they can move to new tasks". The findings support the previous research evidence that technological proficiency is critical in organizations. Gen Z is the most proficient in technology compared to other generations (Basantes Andrade et al., 2020). However, they want the organizations to provide adequate rewards and recognition for their talent (Chopra & Bhilare, 2020).

Career Expectations

Regarding career expectations, the findings contradict the earlier expectations that older generations prefer job security and stability, recognition and respect, work-life balance, and retirement planning (Serviss, 2020). Younger generations also prefer job security and stability. The participant from the National Archive said, "Gen Y and Gen Z are not far-sighted and are willing to reject promotion because they do not want to move from their original workplace." He added, "What is happening in the organization now, when hiring, they [Gen Y and Gen Z] promise to be ready for all things that may happen, such as employment in Sabah/Sarawak, but when it happens in the real situation, they present various reasons."

The participant from the EPF provides a different view on career expectations. He said, "The young blood is all fast. They want to show the outcome. When they do not get the desired outcome, they get stressed and feel like they have not achieved anything. So, they skip work and blame old people for the toxic culture that old people do not want to change". The findings provide evidence of the similarities and differences between different workforce generations regarding career expectations. Past research found that intrinsic and extrinsic factors determine Gen Z's career aspirations and Gen Z has well-defined career expectations and career development plans (Barhate & Dirani, 2022).

Commitment and Loyalty

The final part of the findings is related to commitment and loyalty. It is a standard agreement that younger generations are less committed and loyal than older generations ((Seifert et al., 2023). The participant from the National Archive said, "Gen Y and Gen Z cannot be given a big job that involves commitment from outside and inside [of the organization] because it will not achieve the organization's own needs." This view is supported by the representative from the EPF who said, "Gen Y, on the other hand, seems to be objective, but they will look for other alternative ways to ease their work."

Regarding loyalty concerns, the participant from the EPF added, "Gen Z is now too driven by dopamine and wants instant gratification. If they do not see it in a short period, even if there is a 5% increase in salary, they will jump to other organizations." It is confirmed that younger generations of the workforce are less likely to be committed and loyal to their organizations than their older counterparts. The findings are consistent with those of a study in Indonesia that found that employee trust and satisfaction strongly impacted employee organizational commitment, and employee organizational commitment impacted employee loyalty (Azzam & Harsono, 2021).

Possible Solutions to Address the Value Mismatch in the Organization

The participants were also asked about potential solutions to the mismatch between organizational values and those of different workforce generations. They provided several potential solutions.

The participant from the National Archive suggested, "This matter needs to be managed by Gen X and also Baby Boomers regarding understanding in the organization." He added, "In terms of knowledge, things about work need to take time to learn, but in managing activities and programs, we need to train them; otherwise, they will not follow the standards that the organization wants to achieve."

He added, "An Integrity Unit must be established in the organization after Act 17(A) was established to ensure that employees are not involved in wrongdoing". The participant from the EPF supports it, "Integrity starts with giving awareness to the staff in the hope that the staff can understand it from time to time." He added, "We create a program to develop integrity to ensure people follow through. This program has a different approach for each Gen, but the goal is the same".

Regarding technology proficiency, the participant from the National Archive suggested, "We need to align with the government's digitalization wishes. So, the young need to teach Gen X so they can follow the new system. There is a stage where we need to talk with them to accept the current situation slowly".

To create a harmonious working environment, the participant from the National Archive suggested, "The culture of the current generation is very different from the past. Nevertheless, an older generation can still assimilate with the younger generation. Gen X is young at heart. There must be something like that so Gen Y and Z can feel together. There is still respect, just the way of communication".

To facilitate the process of assimilation between different generations at the workplace, the participant from the National Archive suggested, "In the organization, we still strive to build job satisfaction. Give credit even if there are mistakes. The importance of this award is that they are enthusiastic about work. We know that this young person still has shortcomings; in the process, we improve them". "The government created the AKRAB program to overcome the problem."

The participant from LPPKN also supported the view by citing his organization's practices, "LPPKN established the Mentor and Mentee program to reduce the gap between new employees and old employees". The participant from the EPF also agreed with the earlier view, "Due to the difference in the environment of these two groups, the establishment of Team Building activities, training for them to come out of their work cocoons. There will be activities at the end of the month, such as sports, to combine the two groups". "This will not happen overnight and needs to be done continuously."

Regarding the approach to authority, the participant from the EPF said, "There are several things applied in leadership building. How to manage a junior who is older than you? How to manage without authority?". He

added, "There will be preparation for the transition from non-exec to exec, the application of management skills so as not to be surprised when it is necessary to manage people". "This program is mandatory for every staff who wants to be promoted to be prepared".

He also suggested, "The way we overcome this matter is by giving the lead to the younger one while we prepare the younger one to bring Gen X together in the journey. It is not easy". He further explained, "Leaders need to be ready to explain to Gen X. It's just that acceptance is required, maybe in stages. They will accept to a certain degree because this raises insecurities for them. After all, they feel victimized".

Concerning the communication styles used by different generations, the participant from the EPF said, "The skill that older people need to learn now is how to bring the conversation down to the other level. We cannot speak in the same way as those of our age. They cannot accept it. So, if we can bring the conversation level to the right level, they will accept it faster."

All these suggestions highlighted by the participants are potential solutions to the value mismatch between older and younger generations of the workforce and those of the organization.

5. Conclusion

Different generations have different values, which may be advantageous and disadvantageous to the organization. Different values may create healthy competition among the employees but may create conflicts among them. This present study sought to examine the mismatch between older and younger employees regarding values and provide some solutions to address this issue. Six themes have been identified to serve as the main topics of discussion: work-life balance, communication styles, approach to authority, technological proficiency, career expectations, and commitment and loyalty. The findings of the FGD confirm the earlier assumptions that younger generations have different values from older generations. The findings provide valuable insights for future researchers to explore the topic further. It is suggested that future research be conducted to confirm the present study's findings using a quantitative research design. In addition, the study's findings provide guidelines for the management of organizations to develop policies and practices to address generational gaps, especially concerning work-life balance, communication styles, approach to authority, technological proficiency, and career expectations. Proper training programs can also assist in reducing these gaps.

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