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Mariusz Sagan (mariuszsagan@wp.pl) is senior lecturer of international business at Higher School of Economics and Innovation in Lublin and PhD student at Warsaw School of Economics (SGH); Dr. Robert Frankel (rfrankel@unf.edu) is Kip Associate Professor of Marketing & Logistics at the University of North Florida; Dr. Joseph Tomkiewicz (tomkiewiczj@ecu.edu) is Chair and Professor of Management at East Carolina University.

Abstract

Every organization is cognizant of the importance of “pta” in the achievement of its stated goals. Productivity, turnover, and absenteeism can determine the success (or lack thereof) of any business. One of the greatest challenges facing Human Resource professionals today is the integration of several distinct generations. Without the luxury of unlimited resources, organizations need to be able to concentrate on those job attributes that promise to return, in terms of recruitment and retention, the most bang for the buck. The study presented in this article seeks to discover those characteristics that seem to be most important to the greatest number of people.

Introduction

Demographic changes within the United States population may begin to highlight differences within employee groups that will continue into the future. Over the last thirty years a prime focus of research has been (and continues to be) the job expectations of employees (for example: Schuler, 1975; Brief, Rose, & Aldag, 1977; Jurgensen, 1978; Brief and Oliver, 1976; Fiorentine, 1980; Bridges, 1989). Much of the research has focused on the differences between men and women. Many studies have looked at the job preferences of men and women in business, with no clear-cut consensus about the differences between what men and women want out of their job environment. (Konrad, et.al, 2000) As important as sexual differences have been and will continue to be, organizations are facing another demographic fact of life that might cause as much angst as sexual differences.

The makeup of the American labor-force is shifting. Possibly the principal difference will be the emergence of clearly distinguishable age groups. At the present time there are three distinguishable age cohorts in the working population. Those that are considered Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964. Generations X and Y were born between 1965 to 1977 and 1978 to 2000, respectively. Sujansky (2004) contended that managers needed to prepare for the distinctive requirements of Gen Y and the friction likely to exist among Gen X, Gen Y, and Baby Boomers as they intermingle in the workplace. Sujansky (2004), believing that the generation gap has returned, suggested that generational differences represent a critical new aspect of workplace diversity. Organizations will be faced with several generations of employees working together, each possessing very different values, attitudes, and expectations. Piktialis and Morgan (2003) believed that the aging of the Baby Boom generation and the continuing extension of human longevity will force employers of all kinds to rethink attitudes and practices regarding older workers. The implication was that Baby Boomers would be around longer than might have been expected, given the "traditional" idea of retirement from the workforce at age sixty-five.

Differences in job expectations, job orientations and importance placed on both intrinsic and extrinsic factors among different generations of workers can cause clashes and can diminish productivity (Piktialis 2004). Shellenbarger (2001) reported that the hottest flashpoint for age bias is the widespread perception that older workers are unable or unwilling to adapt to accelerating change.

It should not be expected that young employees share Baby Boomer values and preferred reward systems (Dean, 2002). However, Dean suggested that managers who themselves may be baby-boomers should accept such generational differences and perform their managerial roles in developing new talent to accomplish the goals of the organization.

The cohorts that follow the Baby Boom generation are not large enough to fully take over from Boomers, especially managers. Organizations, therefore, will be faced with

the prospect of trying to “seduce” older managers to stay beyond expected retirement (Kaihla 2003).

The probability that business organizations will be affected by this change affecting workplace diversity is high. Intergenerational differences have been determined in the areas of behaviors, attitudes, values, compensation expectations, communications, and other diversity factors. (Lahiri, 2001; Sujansky, 2004). Intergenerational friction among employees may have negative effects on the productivity of the organization that lead to missed opportunities that influence the bottom line.

American companies can anticipate continual pressures to reduce costs and increase productivity in confronting challenging competition from both international and domestic competitors. To be successful in such an environment, managers will need to energetically deal with internal intergenerational conflicts. Mismatching an employee's preference to an organization's ability to satisfy that desire can lead to job dissatisfaction and its attendant problems (i.e., turnover, absenteeism, etc.) (Wanous, 1980).

The purpose of the present study was to examine how daunting for organizations might be the challenge of trying to satisfy the expectations of diverse age groups. An organization must recruit, hire, develop, and retain its employees in an environment of vigorous competition for talented employees. In order to sustain a competitive edge and harness management talent, organizations must make generational competence part of their human capital strategy. This study examined the expectations and preferences of job attributes among the three predominant generation groups: Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y professional workers. In addition, a sample of college students was also included. While the students chosen for this study fall into the Gen Y category, based on age, they had not been full-time participants in the labor force and, therefore, were likely to be distinct in their expectations from the Gen Y cohort. Any differences that might exist between these two groups could be important in determining recruitment strategies for college recruiters.

Method

Data was collected from two groups of respondents during late 2006 early 2007. The college sample represented business majors enrolled at an (AACSB) accredited university in the eastern part of the United States. One hundred and four questionnaires were distributed to students in a capstone business course which resulted in ninety-three useable forms (only those not working full time). There were 58 males (average age: 21.7) and 35 females (average age: 21.1).

The American professionals were employed in the sectors of distribution (grocery, dental, industrial), services (legal, accounting, medical, education) and retail (sporting goods and recreation, furniture). The questionnaires were either mailed or delivered in person to the companies which agreed to participate in the research. There was a

“contact” individual in each company responsible for questionnaire distribution and collection. In the case of questionnaire collection at the company site, envelopes were provided to ensure anonymity for respondents. For the mailed questionnaires, self-addressed, stamped return envelopes were provided to ensure anonymity for respondents. Follow-up reminder emails were sent to the contact individual approximately two weeks following the receipt of the initial questionnaire distribution. A total of 295 questionnaires were completed, of which 203 could be used for this study (those discarded were missing information). From this group, respondents were classified according to age parameters of Baby Boomers (N=69; 35 males [average age: 52.5], 34 females [average age: 47.9]), Gen X (N=56; 26 males [average age: 33.0], 30 females [average age: 33.5]) and Gen Y (N=78; 39 males [average age: 22.4], 39 females [average age: 22.1]).

Participants were asked to rate 25 job characteristics according to their importance to the rater on a five-point scale (5=Very Important, 1=Not important) in the same manner as had previously been done by Manhardt (1972), Brenner and Tomkiewicz (1979, 1982), Bartol and Manhardt (1979), Beutell and Brenner (1986) and Tomkiewicz, Brenner, and Damanpour, (1994). Manhardt developed this scale to provide a less theoretical and more specific method of measuring differences in job orientation. The reliability of the instrument in the present study was calculated to be 0.89. The mean scores of each of the 25 items were compared across age groups. In addition, each of the 25 items were categorized as intrinsically motivating or extrinsically motivating and summed. (See Exhibit 1 below.) Individual item scores for the 13 intrinsic and 12 extrinsic characteristics were summarized and compared among groups using analysis of variance.

Exhibit 1

Thirteen intrinsic factors and twelve extrinsic factors are present in the twenty-five job expectations. The cause of intrinsic motivation is a need or incentive that takes place within the individual and is directly related to the task (e.g., sense of achievement). Extrinsic motivation is caused by an event or stimulus that happens outside the individual and is related to external circumstances (e.g., salary).

Intrinsic Factors	Extrinsic Factors
Requires originality, creativeness	Provides job security
Uses specific education	Can earn high income
Encourages development of skills & knowledge	Allows working with congenial associates
Respected by others	Provides ample leisure time off the job
Makes a social contribution	Provides change/variety in duties/activities
Allows you to take risks	Provides comfortable working conditions
Work on problems of central importance to company	Permits advancement to high admin. Responsibility
Permits working independently	Requires supervising others
Rewards good performance with recognition	Satisfies cultural/aesthetic interests
Intellectually stimulating	Clear cut rules and procedures to follow
Permits you to work for superiors you admire and respect	Permits a regular routine in time and place of work
Permits you to develop your own methods of doing the work	Requires meeting and speaking with many other people
Provides a feeling of accomplishment	

Results

The Spearman Rank correlation coefficient between the rank order of items was significant for all groups at the minimum of $p \leq 0.01$. Thus, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, and students were very similar in how they ranked each of the 25 items. (See Table 1 below.)

Table 1

Job Expectation Item	Baby Boomers (N=69)			Gen X (N=56)			Gen Y (N=78)			Students (N=93)		
	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD
1-requires originality, creativeness	15	3.8	0.797	17	3.68	1.081	25	3.27	1.028	22	3.49	0.789
2-uses specific education	20	3.59	1.167	15	3.71	1.202	17	3.6	0.998	10	3.9	0.822
3-encourages development of skills & knowledge	5	4.25	0.755	5	4.27	0.944	2	3.96	0.946	8	4.04	0.884
4-respected by others	7	4.22	0.944	6	4.27	1.018	3	3.91	0.814	5	4.25	0.928
5-provides job security	2	4.41	0.885	1	4.61	0.824	7	3.89	0.974	2	4.4	0.927

6-can earn high income	8	4.16	0.851	3	4.29	0.936	5	3.9	1.014	4	4.26	0.987
7-makes a social contribution	16	3.72	0.96	19	3.57	0.951	14	3.63	0.818	16	3.63	0.915
8-allows you to take risks	19	3.65	0.997	22	3.33	1.019	16	3.61	0.881	24	3.46	0.776
9-work on problems of central importance to company	14	3.84	0.868	18	3.68	1.011	23	3.41	0.946	20	3.53	0.805
10-allows working with congenial associates	6	4.23	0.807	12	4.02	0.913	21	3.47	0.912	23	3.49	0.845
11-provides ample leisure time off the job	18	3.71	0.987	14	3.89	1.073	11	3.71	1.01	12	3.76	0.93
12-provides change/variety in duties/activities	12	3.97	0.727	16	3.71	1.031	12	3.71	0.955	13	3.72	0.826
13-provides comfortable working conditions	13	3.88	0.867	7	4.21	0.889	1	4.07	0.899	3	4.27	0.893
14-permits advancement to high admin. Responsibility	17	3.72	0.889	13	4	0.991	20	3.51	1.016	6	4.16	0.876
15-permits working independently	9	4.13	0.803	9	4.16	0.811	9	3.72	0.952	14	3.72	0.971
16-rewards good performance with recognition	3	4.36	0.747	4	4.29	1.039	8	3.77	0.916	7	4.11	0.883
17-requires supervising others	24	3.16	0.851	25	3.09	1.116	22	3.43	1.069	18	3.56	0.972
18-intellectually stimulating	4	4.26	0.721	8	4.2	0.84	6	3.9	1.027	9	4	0.885
19-satisfies cultural/aesthetic interests	21	3.32	1.007	23	3.29	1.022	10	3.72	0.966	17	3.63	0.98
20-clear cut rules and procedures to follow	23	3.21	1.127	20	3.46	1.128	19	3.56	1.112	19	3.55	0.984
21-permits you to work for superiors you admire and respect	10	4.03	0.907	11	4.09	0.94	15	3.63	1.141	15	3.7	0.976

22-permits a regular routine in time and place of work	25	3.06	1.162	21	3.45	1.094	24	3.28	1.127	25	3.35	1.11
23-requires meeting and speaking with many other people	22	3.3	1.033	24	3.25	1.049	18	3.59	1.037	21	3.52	0.916
24-permits you to develop your own methods of doing the work	11	4.01	0.737	10	4.11	0.846	13	3.69	1.01	11	3.81	0.888
25-provides a feeling of accomplishment	1	4.63	0.596	2	4.52	0.874	4	3.91	0.928	1	4.49	0.963
Intrinsic		52.62	6.250		52.44	7.937		47.79	6.549		50.30	6.445
		12	58		44	65		17	78		68	81
Extrinsic		44.25	6.847		45.27	7.300		44.07	5.677		45.78	5.984
		37	57		78	6		04	84		57	06

The standard deviations of the importance ratings were higher for Gen X as compared to Baby Boomers on 23 of the 25 items, with a mean of .99 for Gen X and .89 for Baby Boomers. Thus, it would appear that the Gen X in this group are less homogeneous than the Baby Boomers. Gen Y had higher standard deviations on 18 of the items when compared with Baby Boomers, with a mean of .98. Students had higher standard deviations on 13 of the 25 items when compared with Baby Boomers, with an average of .91. Gen X had higher standard deviations as compared to Gen Y on 14 of 25 items. Gen X had higher standard deviations as compared to students on 16 items. Finally, Gen Y had higher standard deviations as compared to students on 20 items. Thus, in order of homogeneity it may be said of this total sample that Baby Boomers were most homogeneous; students were next, followed by Gen Y and Gen X, with the latter displaying the most variability.

In comparing the groups with regard to intrinsic factors, it was found that no difference existed between Baby Boomers and X'ers but differences did exist between Boomers and Y'ers ($p \leq .001$) and students ($p \leq .05$). Significant differences existed between X'ers and Y'ers ($p \leq .001$), but, curiously, not between X'ers and students. And, finally, and perhaps even more curiously since they are technically of the same generation, significant differences existed between Y'ers and students ($p \leq .05$). This seems to imply that age alone may not be the determining factor in expectations. In order of magnitude, Boomers had the highest total score for intrinsic factors, X had the second highest, students were next highest, while Y had the lowest score.

There were no differences among the groups when looking at the package of extrinsic factors, although as pointed out, individual extrinsic items did differ among the groups.

From the point of view of an organization trying to ascertain what might be an appropriate strategy to use to assure the attraction of new hires while placating existing, a more focused look at expectations would be in order. Therefore, this study looked at the top five rankings of each of the four groups. It may be assumed that while, as Samuel Gompers (founder of the American Federation of Labor) replied when asked what workers wanted: "More," what employees want is more of some things than of other things. From this perspective, as can be noted from the rankings shown in Table 1, out of the 25 characteristics, only eight items make the top five in at least one of the group's rankings. Taken in item order, #3 ("encourages development of skills & knowledge") is listed in the top five by three groups (Boomers, X, and Y), #4 ("respected by others") by two groups (Y and students), #5 ("provides job security") by three groups (Boomers, X, and students), #6 ("can earn high income") by three groups (X, Y, and students), #13 ("provides comfortable working conditions") by two groups (Y and students), #16 ("rewards good performance with recognition") by two groups (Boomers and X), #18 ("intellectually stimulating") by one group (Boomers), and #25 ("provides a feeling of accomplishment") by all four groups. No other item was ranked by any group in their top five.

Discussion

Hanacek (2006) observed that in the business world, companies that understand that success is about the people in the organization are usually the ones with the greatest long-term success. Turnover of valuable employees, particularly those in the mid to senior years, may be the worst thing an organization has to fear. Unfortunately, Miller (2007) reported that a survey conducted by Sibson Consulting showed decreasing satisfaction between 2003 and 2006 among employees. As stated in the consulting report, such results tend to be leading indicators of turnover. Or, and perhaps worse from the point of view of an organization, employees may quit on the job through disengaging from their work and causing productivity to fall.

Given the available literature on the potential problems faced by organizations trying to please three groups of age distinct workers plus contemplating the recruitment of new graduates, the results of this study present a somewhat less intimidating message to HRM departments. If a company concentrated on the five items that ranked the highest with every age group, only eight items would be paramount and it might escape the uncertainty and expense that could exist in trying to provide for a panoply of employee-by-generation job expectations. It seems evident that, while the list of job wants could literally be endless, there are some things that rank as more important, one might even say essential, when getting down to specifics.

For example, one might expect that an organization's Baby Boomers will have been with the organization for a relatively longer time than the other groups. They have made a commitment to the company and perhaps anticipate completing their working life with this particular organization. In our sample, these individuals are seeking rewards that come from the work itself (#25, a feeling of accomplishment) accompanied by job

security (item #5, ranked second). The importance of these is supported by the high value they place on recognition and the desire for intellectual stimulation. This closely parallels the response of Gen X'ers. Both these groups, having spent relatively a greater time in the labor force value intrinsic factors to a greater extent than do their younger (Gen Y) coworkers.

On the other hand, both Gen Y and students emphasized the importance of comfortable working conditions (item #13, ranked #1 and #3 by Gen Y and students, respectively) while it was not ranked in the top five of either Baby Boomers or Gen X. And, while students in this sample did indicate a greater desire for intrinsic factors than did similarly aged Gen Y, such difference should not distract recruiters from the greater number of similarities between the two groups. (See Table 2 below.) It might be that while a student, he/she derives a great sense of satisfaction in recognizing personal growth in knowledge. However, upon graduation and employment, the recognition of the reality of earning one's way in the world becomes a homogenizing element between "students" and Gen Yers. Students, after all, are embryonic Gen Yers.

Table 2

Top 5 Characteristics in Order

Baby Boomers	GenX	GenY	Students
#25-provides a feeling of accomplishment	#5-provides job security	#13-provides comfortable working conditions	#25-provides a feeling of accomplishment
#5-provides job security	#25-provides a feeling of accomplishment	#3-encourages development of skills & knowledge	#5-provides job security
#16-rewards good performance with recognition	#6-can earn high income	#4-respected by others	#13-provides comfortable working conditions
#18-intellectually stimulating	#16-rewards good performance with recognition	#25-provides a feeling of accomplishment	#6-can earn high income
#3-encourages development of skills & knowledge	#3-encourages development of skills & knowledge	#6-can earn high income	#4-respected by others

Conclusion

Meglin, et. Al. (1989) suggested that differences existing in job orientations may be organizationally induced. Thus, even though individuals might enter the organization

with one set of expectations, given time, those expectations would change to meet the reality of the actual work environment. In other words, an individual may have wants and needs that are altered by exposure to the realities of a particular organization. Problems could materialize if the actualities existing within an organization are too far removed from the desires of employees.

Deductively, such problems can be anticipated when the make-up of the employee group is diverse. As stated earlier, much research on diversity has concentrated on the increasing percentage of women in the workforce. Racial diversity has generated considerable dialogue (Brenner & Tomkiewicz, 1982; Thrower, 1991; Tomkiewicz, et.al., 1997; Tomkiewicz, 2000) as has multiculturalism (Ramsey, 1993; Wigglesworth, 1997; White, 2000; Pellet, 2005). The present study, while not attempting to generalize to all workers in all age groups, indicates that it might be possible to concentrate on, and thereby refine, a limited number of work-environment attributes that would satisfy most (if not all) of the desires of a (age) diverse workforce. The Conference Board (2007) reported that Americans were increasingly unhappy with their jobs. They reported that less than half of all Americans indicated satisfaction with their jobs compared with 61 percent twenty years earlier. Organizations need to be cognizant of both similarities and differences among their employees. The present study indicates that similarities appear to be more likely than differences, and the alarms that have been raised by several writers may be slightly overblown. Those organizations able to focus on the management of people in the most efficient manner are likely to experience the greatest success in an ever-changing diverse economic environment.

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Note: Photograph above is by Carole E. Scott



