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IS IT NECESSARY TO DEVELOP NEW PERFORMANCE MOTIVATION AND TRAINING TECHNIQUES IN RESPONSE TO THE ENTRANCE OF GENERATION Y TO THE WORKFORCE?

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The distinct work habits and expectations of Generation Y have been a popular topic in literature and corporate seminars, spawning a school of thought that particular human resource strategies should be designed to maximize the potential of this newest generation. Critical analysis raises questions regarding the advisability of adapting performance motivation and training approaches strictly based upon the birth cohort of this newest, significantly large generation entering the American workforce.

The diversity of the American workforce has been examined in a multitude of ways with respect to human resource management. The ethnic makeup of the working population has been studied, producing theories on the need to either assimilate or encourage cultural identities (DeCenzo & Robbins, 2002). The impact of economic conditions and the financial status of employees on motivation has been the topic of previous research (Pascarella, 1984). With a growth in female participation in the workforce, the role of gender in human resource strategies is a critical topic for study (Statt, 1994). All of these factors merit analysis by those who determine HR strategies today.

However, there exists another dynamic that HR professionals may need to consider: the varied generational makeup of the workforce. HR personnel design their strategies to elicit higher performance from employees and to provide effective training to those workers with due attention to their diverse backgrounds and unique learning skills. Employees of different generations may merit that type of attention during the HR strategy design processes if it can be determined that each generational cohort holds unique qualities that previous cohorts did not possess. This paper will examine that generational diversity, concentrating on the entry of the latest generation into the workforce, those born within the last quarter century. The major question is whether HR strategists must adapt performance motivation and training approaches to maximize the effectiveness of those tasks based on the unique qualities of this latest generation, variously labeled as 'Generation Y,' the 'Millennials,' and 'Nexters,' among other names (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak,

2000). If adaptation is necessary, what types of performance motivation and training strategies would be most effective? To address these questions, it must first be determined whether subdividing the workforce into generations is relevant and to establish whether there are specific individual characteristics that are generally shared by members of a generational cohort. If they do exist, it must be determined whether these traits are statistically different enough to merit attention on the topics of performance motivation and training.

THE CONCEPT OF GENERATIONS

The theme of generations has drawn a great deal of interest over the past several decades. As society has evolved, many have searched for explanation for the changes. Popular entertainment has played up the role of clashing generations. As far back as the 1950's, television programming and theatrical treatments have focused on the generation gap, with rebellious youth movements meeting strong resistance from older authority figures; this theme has continued as a favorite movie premise in the contemporary entertainment industry. Further, generational differences have been co-opted by mass marketers as products are tested for their appeal to desired birth cohorts (Mitchell, 1998). Products, and their subsequent marketing strategies, are carefully designed to capitalize on the needs and desires of specific age groups. Generational variations also draw interest from economists, sociologists, and political analysts who seek to identify trends, determine expected outcomes, and theorize on ways to influence those outcomes (de St. Aubin, McAdams, & Kim, 2004; Esler, 1984; Mitchell, 1998). With such interest devoted to the social,

political, commercial, and financial tendencies of individuals of specific generations, it is not surprising that popular literature has touched upon the dynamic of generations in the workplace (Lancaster et al., 2002; Martin & Tulgan, 2002; Zemke et al., 2000). Yet the study of generations has much older roots in the field of sociology.

The first to write extensively on the field of generational study was Karl Mannheim in 1931 (de St. Aubin et al., 2004; Wolff, 1971). In the context of studying social change, Mannheim defined generational tendencies along a spectrum, moving from the broad sense of shared birth cohorts to the narrower common destiny, then to the extreme, a uniform response to common experiences. Specifically, Mannheim saw the shared birth cohort as a broad classification of those who, by circumstances of birth timing, are exposed to similar historical and social influences. Generational identity is strengthened by what he called 'generation as actuality,' which referred to those who were intellectually and socially involved with the ideas of their time. As individuals chose common responses to existing social events and trends, their generational bond was made even stronger, defining them as part of the 'generation unit' (de St. Aubin et al., 2004). Further, Mannheim's belief was that those who were part of a generation unit held the strongest shared generational consciousness. Mannheim felt that people are most impressionable between the ages of 17 and 25 (Griffin, 2004). At this age, the social imprints that establish a generational identity may be made. In summary, it was Mannheim's belief that individuals of a specific age group during a time of significant historical and social events, which he called 'a common location in the historical dimension of the social process,' with an awareness of the momentous import of the time, and possibly making life decisions based on that awareness, have the potential for forming a generation unit (Mannheim, 1970). Yet that unit will only be formed through social interaction that fits within a framework of a slight shifting of 'modes of behavior, feeling and thought' prevalent at that point in time; individuals in a generation unit will exhibit attitudes and sentiments that will be distinct from previous generations while at the same time be reasonable on the scale of social stratum (Mannheim, 1970).

An example of the development of a generation unit might be found in a time of history when a country is heading for a war. Those who are becoming of age to serve in the military may become aware of the political and historical environment, where talk of growing aggression with an adversary permeates. This is the actualization stage. As the members of a generation join military service and together go off to war, the first stage of solidifying the generation unit is achieved. The next stage is the establishment of similar social attitudes and feelings among those of a certain age group as a result of the impact of war and geopolitical upheaval. When the events of the times influence a common development of 'modes of behavior, feeling and thought' then a generational unit is forged (Mannheim, 1970). Students of the Mannheim school of thought have even associated generation units with the ability to not only form certain behavioral patterns, but to bring about social and political change in certain historical contexts (Braungart, 1984). Based upon the significance and impact of certain social and historical events in the U.S. during the past century, there appears to be clear potential for the actualization of generations as well as the formation of generation units using Mannheim's model.

GENERATIONS IN THE AMERICAN WORKFORCE

Assuming a working age for most individuals falling between 16 and 65, the popular literature identifies four major generations populating the workforce (Judy & D'Amico, 1999; Lancaster et al., 2002; Martin et al., 2002; Zemke et al., 2000). There exists some disagreement over the oldest generation – some choosing to consider Traditionalists, those born between 1900 and 1945 while others narrow it to Veterans, singling out those born between 1922 and 1943 (Lancaster et al., 2002; Zemke et al., 2000). Because most born before 1922 have already exited the workforce, it seems more appropriate to focus on the cohort known as Veterans. That generation was followed by the Baby Boomers, those born between approximately between 1943 and 1964. Generation X followed, populated by individuals born between approximately 1964 and 1980. By popular accounts, the most recent generation to

join the workforce is Generation Y, born after 1980 (Chester, 2002).

Veterans

The Veterans generation, consisting of about 52 million individuals, was significantly impacted by the events associated with the depression, World War II, and the Korean War(Zemke et al., 2000). Surviving the dire financial conditions of the Great Depression left a major imprint on this generation. Seeing their parents lose jobs or struggle to survive on meager wages has led this generation to be associated with frugality and resourcefulness. As consumers, Veterans buy 'up' - moving from an Oldsmobile to a Cadillac, for example, but only if the purchase makes fiscal sense (Zemke et al., 2000). The spirit of teamwork and government participation embodied by such federal programs as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration engendered this generation with a sense of loyalty and faith in institutions – the company, the family, and the government(Lancaster et al., 2002). With the need for the United States to gird for war, and ultimately to join the fray in 1941, rallying the population to sacrifice and focus on the war effort, a sense of patriotism became a trademark for the Veterans generation. This generation believed that if they worked hard and followed the rules, over the course of time, their efforts would be rewarded (Lancaster et al., 2002).

The popular literature defines many of these traits through deductive reasoning. For example, the authors link the state of the economy during the Great Depression to the tendency to display frugal behaviors (Lancaster et al., 2002, Zemke et al., 2000). However, some of the traits have been supported by survey results. Randstad's 2004 Employee Review indicates that 86% of older workers 'feel a strong bond to their current employers'(RoperASW, 2004). The same survey indicates that 78% of these workers expect to be at the same company in two years and are looking for a lifelong career. In the BridgeWorks Generation Survey, the source of data for the book, 'When Generations Collide,' twice as many of the oldest generation than other generations agreed that individuals should endeavor to create a lifetime career with one company (Lancaster et al., 2002). The fact that 88% of mature workers place

emphasis on either the family or a combination of work-and-family indicates the devotion to the home as an institution (ABC, 2004). The common theme in the popular literature is that Veterans get satisfaction from a workplace where their experience and knowledge are appreciated (Lancaster et al., 2002; Martin et al., 2002; Zemke et al., 2000).

Baby Boomers

The next generation unit in the workforce is the Baby Boomer generation. Comprised mainly of individuals born between 1943 and 1964 and primarily populated by the offspring of the Veterans generation, this is the largest cohort in the contemporary workforce at over 80 million members. Riding the wave of economic boom following World War II, this generation benefited from low unemployment, growth in consumer goods, and great education opportunities, thus generating a shared optimism among Boomers (Lancaster et al., 2002). At impressionable ages, Baby Boomers lived through tumultuous times. Assassinations of political and spiritual leaders, growing involvement in an unpopular war resulting in the deaths of many of this generation's members, space exploration, and political scandal all were brought into homes daily on television. The Baby Boomer generation was socially and intellectually involved in the times, as well; a major characteristic of this generation was the scope of change that took place – politically and socially (Lancaster et al., 2002). As agents of change, Boomers questioned authority and developed distrust towards anyone over 30. Due to the size of this generation, students learned in overcrowded classrooms, were forced to work together with shared resources, thus developing teamwork skills by necessity (Zemke et al., 2000).

Statistics seem to support many of the characteristics of the Baby Boomer generation. Supporting the claim that this generation worked to change the status quo, 27% of Boomers, more than Veterans and Generation Y, view themselves as extremely or slightly liberal (Mitchell, 1998). This generation leads all of the other contemporary generations in lack of confidence in the government; in one survey, 46% of Boomers have hardly any confidence in Congress, and 44% feel the same about the executive branch (Mitchell, 1998). That Boomers are distrustful is

indicated by their feeling that 51% of people are looking out for themselves, exceeding all except Generation X (Mitchell, 1998). Statistics indicate that Boomers do want to be proud of their work and to be recognized for their contribution; their top reason for remaining with a company was 'making a difference' (Lancaster et al., 2002). And more Boomers prioritized 'work' over family than the other three generations (ABC, 2004). This generation wanted to settle into a job for life, with regular hours of work and the promise of a defined benefits pension plan for their retirement years (Rodriguez, Green, & Ree, 2003).

Generation X

The birth group that followed the Boomers is called Generation X. Although primarily associated with Douglas Coupland's book, 'Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture,' the label and its connotations were actually lifted by Coupland from a previous book by Paul Fussell, concerning a category of people who have abandoned the pursuit of a conventional materialistic lifestyle (LaborLawTalk.com, 2005). While they have not completely forsaken material gain, the traits of Gen X indicate a path unique from previous generations. Young Xers saw the President resign in disgrace, skyrocketing divorce rates among their parents, and a multitude of scandals involving religious leaders – thus crumbling the sense of trust in institutions (Lancaster et al., 2002; Zemke et al., 2000). This generation grew up in a time when massive corporate layoffs were sending their parents home after years of loyal service with a company, consequently supplanting their own expectation of a lifetime career; Xers focus on developing skills that will help their career, either at the present job or for another employer (Zemke et al., 2000). Often the product of broken families or, at the very least, families where both parents worked, young Xers were latchkey children, expected to complete homework assignments and household chores without adult supervision – endowing them with a self-reliance and independence not found in prior generations (Martin et al., 2002; Zemke et al., 2000). They are the first group to fully participate in the Information Age: using computers from an early age, growing up in front of a television with an expanding number of broadcast channels, benefiting from a growth in multimedia teaching tools, and spending leisure time huddled over electronic games. From this broad technology explosion they developed a techno-literacy and a need for rapid fire satisfaction in whatever they do (Zemke et al., 2000). With the expectation of instant gratification, they look for ways to 'work smarter, not harder' and to have fun at work(Martin et al., 2002). Out of the exposure to multimedia, Gen X experienced diversity like no other generation before them. Whether it was from the *Sesame Street* television show teaching them how to speak Spanish or from the growth in diversity in the classroom, Gen X has a level of acceptance and comfort with people of wide backgrounds and interests (Lancaster et al., 2002).

Survey results support many of the claims about Generation X. The fact that 87% of Xers feel that they are either family-centric or dual-centric while only 13% feel that they are work-centric indicates the widest ratio of non-work-centric to work-centric (ABC, 2004). Generation Xers scored higher than Boomers on the desire to use technology in the workplace (Rodriguez et al., 2003). Xers also prefer informal work arrangements, including flexible schedules, job sharing, and telecommuting over structured environments (Rodriguez et al., 2003). A job with a portable 401K plan is preferable to a Generation Xer, ostensibly to allow the freedom to change jobs (Rodriguez et al., 2003). And the motivation to change jobs may arise from realization that the current employment is not challenging or fun (Rodriguez et al., 2003). After all, this generation more than all but the Veterans placed high value on staying with an employer if the work was satisfying (RoperASW, 2004). But their options remained open, as only 17% of Xers considered having the plan of a lifelong career as a worthy goal, compared to 70% of the oldest generation (Lancaster et al., 2002).

Generation Y

The next generation identified in popular literature has been tagged with many labels. Recognizing the transition from the previous generations, some call them Generation Next, the Boomlets, Echo Boomers, or Baby Busters (Chester, 2002; Lancaster et al., 2002). Anticipating the impact of this group as we progress through the early twenty-first century, some have labeled them the Millennials (Lancaster

et al., 2002). Recognizing the inquisitive nature of these young people, Eric Chester has chosen to describe this birth cohort as Generation Why (Chester, 2002). However, the most popular tag follows logically from the previous generation, labeling this new group Generation Y (Martin & Tulgan, 2001).

Members of Generation Y, born since 1980, have been impacted by the idealistic parenting style of their Boomer mothers and fathers, endowing them with a motivation to spring into action when the situation turns bad (Lancaster et al., 2002). Based on the size of the Boomer generation, this group is expected to approach 72 million, a close second to the parent generation (Zemke et al., 2000). With the explosion of technology in the past twenty years, this generation is able to maintain an almost constant connectivity; Generation Y has the ability to seek out and get the information it wants nearly instantaneously (Zemke et al., 2000). Work habits reflect the sentiment that their Boomer parents were too interested in balancing their job into the family equation; Gen Yers place family on a much higher priority (Rodriguez et al., 2003). They are optimistic about the future and confident that they can change things from within the system (Zemke et al., 2000). By the time they hit the workforce, Gen Yers have been exposed to a wide variety of people and places through contact with the media, the internet, traveling, school, and day care, and have developed an expectation of diversity in the workplace (Lancaster et al., 2002). Because they have been acclimated to maintaining constant contact with each other – through chat rooms and instant messaging, for example – they enjoy working in groups, exchanging ideas, and sharing both work challenges and the rewards that come from finding solutions (Roper/ASW, 2004). By growing up in families that were consumed with achieving at work despite idealistic philosophies, this generation has developed a desire to find more meaningful employment (Rodriguez et al., 2003). With a near universal emphasis on education in society now, this generation seeks to take advantage of training opportunities and learn in the workplace (Roper/ASW, 2004).

Although new to the workplace, members of Generation Y have had opportunities to express their opinions on a variety of topics. Supporting their desire to place an emphasis on family, 50% of Gen Yers claim to be family centric over work or duel centric options, and only 13% claim to be totally work centric (ABC, 2004). Only Generation X approaches this level of disparity between the two positions. The Gen Y view of diversity is indicated by the results of a survey of college freshmen in 1997; 95% of those questioned agreed that race and religion were not really important in a dating situation (Mitchell, 1998). And their priority for acquiring training and education is indicated by the ranking of 'on-site internal training' as the second most important factor keeping them from leaving a job (Roper/ASW, 2004).

DEFINING THE VARIABLES

It is clear to see that the popular literature on generational differences has proposed that there are specific traits attributable to each generation in the workforce. Categorizing those traits allows a more critical analysis of the issue of generational variation. Our focus will be limited to characteristics that contribute to behaviors related to work. First, we will look at values, or the internal guidelines individuals use in choosing to take action when faced with various options (Bengston & Lovejoy, 1973; Rokeach, 1968). In the workplace, values play a part in determining what jobs individuals will take, how long they will stay, and how content they will be. The ideal for an employee is a job where his or her values match those of the employer. Next we will look at attitudes, or the collective beliefs that contribute to one's individual preferential responses to the environment – here, the work environment (Rokeach, 1968). In the workplace, an individual's attitude may contribute to the level of productivity given to the employer. If the stimuli received in the workplace – how or where the work is done, for example – are consistent with the collective product of an individual's beliefs, then higher productivity may result. Attitudes are less basic than values, representing a system of beliefs, while values often underlie attitudes (Rokeach, 1968). Expectations are the next level of traits to be discussed. What individuals expect from their employer is an important part of the worker-management relationship; a scale of fulfilled expectations will closely approximate a scale of employee satisfaction. Finally, the dominant motivator for each generation, or the key

approach, as embodied by Zemke's 'messages that motivate,' will be examined (Zemke et al., 2000).

A progressive scale should be evident from the traits summarized above. If core values held by employees match the work environment, the worker will be initially attracted to the workplace or, once embedded, initially satisfied with the experience. Positive outcomes for the employee arising from responses to the workplace based on attitudes may lead to fortification of that satisfaction over time by validating the underlying values. The fulfillment of expectations contributes to greater retention for employers and higher commitment by employees – the greater number of expectations met, the stronger the commitment. Finally, a match-up of the dominant motivator between employer and employee will result in higher potential for performance. The critical elements in the context of this thesis are the extent to which these traits are found within each generation and the amount of differentiation between generations. Drawing from the popular literature, we will first examine the values, attitudes, expectations, and dominant motivators for each generational cohort.

Values

The dual-centric nature of Veterans, choosing to act in a way that placed equal emphasis on both work and family, helped to define that generation; this is indicated in the 'Generations and Gender' survey, where 54% of those over age 58 indicated that they were dual centric (ABC, 2004). The tendency to conform to structures and rules followed the prevailing sentiment that the war effort was of utmost importance. The diligence of the Veterans and dedication to the wartime efforts was a particularly strong value (Zemke, 2000).

Baby boomers were somewhat work centric according to popular accounts; Boomers indicated that they were work centric by margin of at least 10% over other generations in the 'Generations and Gender' survey (ABC, 2004). The success from functioning in a team atmosphere in overcrowded schools engendered Boomers with a tendency to value teamwork (Zemke, 2000). In a recent report, 70% of Boomers surveyed indicated that the team at work was a primary factor in remaining with their current employer – in fact it was the third highest scored factor (Roper/ASW, 2004). Growing up in a booming economy allowed this cohort to carry optimism to adulthood (Martin et al., 2002; Lancaster, 2002).

Generation X highly values a focus on family; 52% of Xers indicated a family centric focus in the 'Generations and Gender' survey (ABC, 2004). Growing to adulthood exposed to classmates, friends, and popular media personalities of varied backgrounds engendered a strong sense of diversity in Xers. Functioning as latchkey kids fostered the self-reliance so prevalent in Gen X adults (Martin et al., 2002).

Mirroring the previous generation, Gen Y workers also exhibit a strong tendency – 50% choosing family-centric work priorities in the 'Generations and Gender' survey (ABC, 2004). Charged with a duty to make a difference in the world, this generation has developed a social and moral conscience and carried that value into the workplace (Martin et al., 2002). From a high exposure to multiculturalism has sprung a strong acceptance and promotion of diversity (Zemke, 2000).

Attitudes

Similar to the values just listed, a framework of attitudes can be assembled from the brief synopses of each generation provided above. Veterans exhibit a respect for authority arising from their exposure to government management of the economy during the depression and World War II (Martin et al., 2002). From those times also comes the willingness to sacrifice and a strong sense of patience (Lancaster, 2002).

Boomers are self-centered, giving life to the label of the 'Me Generation' (Martin et al., 2002. Lancaster, 2002). Having drawn the focus to themselves, they are driven, with a desire to please others with their accomplishments (Lancaster, 2002).

Members of the Generation X cohort are characterized as having a skeptical attitude towards authority based on their exposure to media and marketing hype (Zemke, 2000). They crave informality after watching their parents' involvement in social rebellion (Martin et al., 2002). Benefiting from growing up simultaneously with the development of personal computers, they show technological superiority at any opportunity (Lancaster et al., 2002).

The newest generation has been characterized as confident and sociable, thriving from the

attention their parents never received (Zemke, 2000). They are innovative and even more technologically literate than Gen X, having literally enjoyed the products of new technology from their infancy (Chester, 2002).

Expectations

The expectations held by workers have evolved over the past several decades. Members of the Veterans Generation sought a career for life, and the company satisfied that by offering a defined benefits pension plan to promote longevity. Baby Boomers shared that sentiment with their parents and as companies continued their rewards for seniority, Boomers provided a commitment of tireless work (Zemke, 2000). Generation X was the first to see massive layoffs and the dissolution of the lifetime employment contract. This generation focused on acquiring portable skills from the employer with the expectation that in exchange for providing training, the employer would benefit from better-trained employees – or else those employees would exit (Zemke, 2000). Along with a commitment to enhancing their skills, Gen X looks to the employer to provide flexibility – flexible hours and telecommuting, for example – and a fun place to work (Rodriguez et al., 2003). The revelation that Generation Y is more interested in careers with meaning may not be significantly different than the expectations of Gen X: where managers were challenged to provide new skills for Gen X, they are now facing the need to make the new skills and tasks interesting (BlessingWhite, 2004).

Dominant Motivators

Finally, the dominant motivators are identified for each generation. These are basically the methods for employers to meet the work expectations of employees. Veterans were satisfied with pension plans, seniority-based compensation systems, and public displays of recognition and appreciation for years of service. For Boomers, the reward had to be more immediate (Zemke et al., 2000). Conspicuous displays of recognition following completion of projects, personal expressions of appreciation, and utilization of innovative work programs, such as quality circles and participative management helped to motivate Boomers (Zemke, et al., 2000).

The challenge to make the job more fun and enjoyable for Xers has been difficult for managers. They must address this situation on three levels – growth opportunities, challenge, and responsibility (Martin et al., 2002). Failure to satisfy these factors for a Gen Xer may lead to a loss of a desirable employee. The motivators for Generation Y as defined in the popular literature provide a serious test. One path towards success with Gen Y workers would be to communicate the significance of the work, energize all in the workplace toward meaningful goals, and financially reward those who succeed. However, a closer examination of the generations may provide more insight into whether employers may design strategies that appeal to the traits described above.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GENERATIONS THEORY

Critical analysis of generational identification can be made on at least three levels. First, are there other ways in which individuals acquire the traits that influence their working lives? We will explore how family generations may impact attitudes and the potential for individual events to be life altering. Second, are the generational units, as defined by Mannheim, significantly established in the American workforce? In other words, do the generations, as they are identified in popular literature, complete Mannheim's three-step process? This means that each generation must be related to significant historical and social events, during which a statistically significant number of individuals of impressionable age – typically ages 17 through 25 - were intellectually aware of the magnitude of the moment, and independently chose responses that coincide with the responses of others in that age group. How Generation Y and previous generations are defined raises questions involving all three steps in this process. And third, do significant numbers of individuals of a generational cohort embrace the traits described previously in this thesis? If particular attributes of a generation are not represented by a large portion of the generation, then forming HR strategies for that generation is meaningless.

Family and Individual Experiences

First, are individuals more influenced in their behavior by the traits and tendencies shared with their generational unit or by other avenues of

development? At the core of this argument is the issue of conformity (de St. Aubin, 2004). Mannheim's theory relies on the concept of initial experiences, or those experiences that form generational identity when individuals conform as a group to a shared set of traits. A counterargument to Mannheim attacks the problem by diminishing the impact of historical and social events on generations and attributing a portion of the development of generational identities to the effect of prior family generations on the succeeding units (de St. Aubin, 2004). As a new generation enters the impressionable age of adolescence, it becomes involved in an exchange between the previous, now midlife, generation. Family and education play a critical role in this generation formation at specific times of an individual's life, rather than strictly social and historical events as they occur (de St. Aubin, 2004). An individual development process is also involved at set stages of life. As one grows through certain age strata and experience common social activities – school, dating, marriage, forming a family - certain attitudes and expectations are engendered as part of existing age norms in a given culture.

The formation of attitudes, values, expectations, and even motivators for work may also be influenced by certain individual experiences (Bee, 1996). These experiences, for example the death of a parent or the inspiration of a teacher, may have varying levels of influence based upon when they occur in one's life; a non-shared experience that takes place at what would be considered an abnormal stage in life would have more impact than if the event took place in what is a socially normal time (Bee, 1996). Relating such events to the topic at hand, one could argue that losing a job at an early age would lead to a more significant disruption of life than if one was near retirement. The types of disruptive events are countless – divorce, separation, death of family members, localized catastrophes and tragedies, just to name a few.

A more basic criticism of Mannheim's generational identity argument focuses on the self-conscious processes of life (de St. Aubin et al., 2004). This counterpoint states that attitudes and behaviors can change based on self-conscious choice at many stages of development through life. Therefore, while some may maintain the

characteristics of their generation, the majority of people will develop as their life experiences, psychological events, and conscious choices establish their identity. While the characteristics of the generations summarized above may be accurate at the time of their formation, circumstances, events, and experiences of the following years provide stimulus to change those characteristics. Although the significant events of the Veterans' impressionable years may dominate over events of subsequent generations, some change may take place to values, attitudes, expectations, or even dominant motivators. It certainly must be considered that one's position in life may impact those variables; as time passes and one faces such life changing events as retirement and old age, there is a strong probability that one's approach to work will become altered in some ways.

Cusps and Subdivisions

The popular literature varies widely on how to address the periods directly before and after a generational unit forms. These periods, or cusps, may be populated by great numbers of individuals unaffected by events of the time periods involved. The greater the proportion of unaffected members, the lower the chances that a generational unit is established. In the popular literature surveyed for this thesis, cusps are addressed by a few different approaches. In the book 'Generations at Work' by Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak, the approach is to subdivide the generations into two halves (Zemke et. al., 2000). Within the Veterans Generation, they have identified the Sandwich Group, those born between 1930 and 1943. This subgroup is basically a group of 'tweeners' whose beliefs and attitudes float somewhere between Veterans and Baby Boomers (Zemke et. al, 2000). By taking this approach, the authors have basically limited the Veterans Generation to the years from 1922 to 1930. Regarding the Boomers, the authors have split the generation into First Half Boomers and Late Boomers. Associating slightly different traits to each group – the First Half were more successful, the Late Boomers were more laid back and cynical – they allow the composite picture to be completed by assuming the sum of the parts equals the whole when it seems more apparent that there are significant differences between the two halves (Zemke et. al., 2000). The authors make a

similar distinction between the early Gen Xers and the later members as well. There is no such subdivision of Generation Y, despite the significant time frame over which the generation spans – 1980 through 2000 – because the generational identity has not had time to evolve in the way previous generations have. As more members age and as history contributes more significant events, changes will undoubtedly occur to the independent variables previously defined – values, attitudes, expectations, and dominant motivators. This fact alone seems to throw doubt into the argument that HR strategies should even be discussed at this early stage for Generation Y.

With the earlier generations, the generational subdivision approach might result in strategies that may only succeed with half of that group. The variations described in 'Generations at Work' are significant enough that the independent variables for each subdivision may be distinct. Based on his description of the Baby Boomer subdivisions, the Late Boomers may be more family centric. Their exposure to layoffs has lowered their expectation of a lifelong career and thus the value of recognition of employee contribution in a workplace that may not hold their future. This changes the whole dynamic for that unit based on the use of values, attitudes, expectations and dominant motivators.

Applying the same test to the subdivided Generation X yields similar results. The First-Half Generation Xers were first populating the workforce in a time of massive layoffs and downsizing. The difficulty in finding suitable employment based on their skills forced them to suppress their independent and entrepreneurial tendencies. Looking for a job that was intrinsically satisfactory was futile (Zemke et al., 2000). However, as the technology boom created a demand for workers with technological literacy, Second-Half Gen Xers benefited. They were able to impact the workplace based upon the particular traits associated with their generation. First-Half Xers benefited as well, but only after persevering through difficult times in most cases (Zemke et al., 2000).

After analyzing the tendencies of the subdivided Baby Boomers and Gen X, it appears that perhaps the actual generation units are half the size of those depicted in the popular literature. In that case, the ability to develop particular HR strategies for such small time periods would seem inefficient.

In their book, 'When Generations Collide,' Lancaster and Stillman acknowledge the existence of cusps between generations. Specifically, they identify three cusps. The first falls at the end of the Veterans and beginning of the Baby Boomer Generations. The second bridges the Boomers and Gen X. The third is between Gen X and Gen Y. Those who fall in these cusps are attributed with a form of generational identity crisis, potentially sharing traits with either the preceding generation or the subsequent group. As leaders, the authors theorize, these individuals have the potential for succeeding with both groups around them, making 'the best managers' as they become 'naturals at mediating, translating, and mentoring' (Lancaster et. al., 2002).

The conflict of generational subdivisions as opposed to cusps introduces the question of whether the generalizations made in these popular works are too broad. By following the 'cusp' approach of Lancaster and Stillman, one could potentially compact the generations into a narrower band, reducing the relevant population of that generation, and therefore decreasing the significance of HR strategies designed for those members. With cusps defined as five year time periods surrounding generations of approximately ten years, one could theorize that new strategies would have to be revised every seven years; a study of whether the cusp has passed would be required before an analysis of the generation could take place to determine the values, attitudes, expectations, and dominant motivators of that generation. Careful monitoring would be needed to identify whether a new cusp had dawned, and a process would be required to measure the cusp's generational identity.

A study by Stephanie Noble and Charles D. Schewe provides data questioning the validity of popular cohort groupings (Noble & Schewe, 2003). The researchers first attempted to determine if significant social and historical events reported by those surveyed coincided with their particular generational cohorts. Analyzing responses from 349 individuals, the researchers found that all of the responses were consistent with the popular generational units; all events listed occurred during the impressionable years of early to young adulthood (Noble et al., 2003).

Next, Noble and Schewe sought to identify whether the surveyed individuals could be grouped into the popular generational units based on their responses to questions about the values they held. These researchers utilized some of the generation subdivisions discussed earlier, looking at units of Depression era, World War II era, Postwar era, early Baby Boomer years, and late Boomer years, in addition to Generation X and Generation Y. Borrowing from Milton Rokeach's value scales, the researchers included items pertaining to self-respect, warm relations with others, sense of accomplishment, social obligation, personal and financial security, and excitement. They discovered that grouping individuals based on their preference for certain values resulted in correct predictions for some of the generations but not others. Specifically, they were able to group members of Generation Y, the early Boomer years, those from the Postwar years, and those from the Depression years. They were not able to distinguish individuals from Generation X, World War II, or late Boomers. In fact, they were unable to place any individuals in those groups and they were unable to differentiate the 114 members surveyed of those generational units from any other cohort based on the responses (Noble et al., 2003).

Noble and Schewe raise several questions about cohort groupings. First, they challenge the popular notion that specific cohorts hold unique values, offering the possibility that differentiation may be at the behavioral level. Second, they theorize that perhaps the historical and social events with which each cohort identifies may not be powerful enough to create the cohort effects we've discussed. They posit that most events are not of a level of impact to create a widespread impression for anybody not directly involved with them – the Gulf War or Kosovo, for example (Noble et al., 2003). The researchers cite the success of nostalgia marketing as an option for appealing to shared memories in consumers. The third idea presented by the researchers refers back to the argument that non-shared individual events and family influence, along with religious and ethnic ties, may have a greater tendency to predict certain values. A final possibility offered by the researchers is that they did not use enough values, or values of a wide enough scope, to allow prediction of cohort groupings.

Homogeneity or Heterogeneity?

Whether the validity of smaller generational units can be established or not, the next problem involves differences of race, origin, gender, and class within those units. To assume that the significant events that contribute to formation of generation units have impacted individuals equally independent of these differences seems unrealistic. An examination of research on this topic provides interesting insight.

A specific historical or social event that is considered sufficiently significant to contribute to the formation of a generation unit may have differing impacts on individuals based on their race. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960's is a prime example of a social situation that may be viewed to impact one race significantly more than others. Conversely, when viewed by the impacted race, a particular situation may carry greater relative importance than other events that highly impacted other races. This was proven in surveys of the significance of the Civil Rights movement; about 1/3 of whites from across the country rated civil rights in the top two of significant events, but more than half of African-Americans assigned those events historical importance (Griffin, 2004). Also significant was that less than 20% of African-Americans surveyed assigned importance to World War II, while overall rates for that event ranged from 22% to 28% regionally across the country (Griffin, 2004). Measuring the impact of the Civil Rights movement in individual surveys was a difficult task due to the inability to assign a particular timeframe to those events. Without a concrete timeframe, it is problematic to determine which individuals fell into the highly impressionable age range of 17 to 25 years and were therefore most impacted by the movement. However, it seems evident that such an event impacted African-Americans more than whites. Whether the impact is sufficient enough to skew the balance of the generation unit is unknown. Yet, it seems worth consideration that at the very least such events would affect some members of the generation differently than others, a point of view that was not addressed in the popular literature reviewed for this thesis. With ethnic diversity growing in the workplace, such a consideration seems critical. The proportion of non-whites by generation indicates the growing ethnic diversity. The ratio of white, non-Hispanic

members by Generation is: Baby Boomers, 79%, Gen X, 70%, and Gen Y, 68% (ABC, 2004). Note that the rising Asian population is not reflected in those figures. It is evident that diversity of race and ethnic background will impact the field of generational studies.

A second variation that may impact formation of a generation unit is the origin of the members of the cohort. The research that explored the Civil Rights movement as an event for African-Americans surveyed whites regionally for their assessment. Significantly, Southern whites who were 17 to 25 years old between 1954 and 1970 felt that the Civil Rights movement was the second most significant event while non-Southern whites rated it sixth (Griffin, 2004). All other events, with a slight variation regarding the Kennedy assassination, were rated nearly the same across all regions. The conclusion can therefore be made that due to the varied impact of such a significant event as the Civil Rights movement, there may be other events that impacted citizens regionally. If such events exist, then the strength of the generation unit by region may be weakened. Further, it is worth noting that the time span of greatest effect of this movement actually bridges two generations – the Baby Boom and Generation X. This type of variation poses a challenge to those proponents of generational differences who prefer to fit events into neat time frames in order to facilitate tidy conclusions.

The growth in diversity of the workforce provides a challenge to the assumptions made by those who write about values held by popular generational units. As generations change composition, the members may bring different backgrounds, from times and places where different events may have formed value systems. The increase of Hispanic/Latinos in the workforce is an example of this growing diversity. The 2000 census reported a Hispanic/Latino population in excess of 35 million people, an increase of 142% over the 1980 census (Henry J. Kaiser Foundation, 2004). Latinos now compose almost 13% of the population. 63% report that they were born outside of the United States or in Puerto Rico, and another 19% report that their parents were immigrants. Although many of those born elsewhere may have moved to the U.S. at an early age, it must be considered that they were influenced by events and cultural background from their origin. This background may have influenced the variation in the social values held by this group, as reported in the Kaiser Foundation report. Those born elsewhere, called First Generation in the report (not a birth cohort 'generation'), hold more conservative values than those born on U.S. soil, judging by their answers to a set of questions on such topics as abortion, divorce and the role of the male in the family (Kaiser Foundation, 2004). The indication of this survey is that values held by a majority of that large portion (63%) of the Hispanic/Latino sector of the population differs from the values held by a majority of the remainder, those who have participated to some extent in the U.S. historical and social development. Wherever those 'First Generation' Hispanic/Latinos fall in the generational cohort categories, they will tend to hold differing values than most of the rest of the cohort.

The disproportionate effect of events on one gender over another is worthy of investigation. There are certainly different points of view held between the sexes within each generation. In a survey of women and men of Gen X, Gen Y, and Boomer ages in 2002, 52% of men wanted to move into jobs with more responsibility while only 36% of women felt the same way (ABC, 2004). Although this result is not broken down specifically by generation, it indicates that attitudes differ between the sexes. While this seems like an obvious expectation, it must be noted that the popular literature reviewed here does not make such differentiations when stereotyping the generations. Because some women of child bearing age may want to drop out of the workforce to bear and raise children, or just to bear them and return to work, there will be a disparity of expectations held by women. With those differing expectations will be a variation in dominant motivators. Therefore, depending on the proportion of women who want to have children in comparison to those who want to strictly pursue a career, there may be an impact on the generational models developed in the popular literature. Further, if there are women who plan to opt out of the workforce within the generation unit, then the HR strategies and techniques espoused in the literature reviewed for this thesis will be ill-suited for those women.

Values held by women in relation to generational cohorts was the focus of the 2003 survey sponsored by Hewlett Packard and the Simmons School of Management (Merrill-Sands, Mattis, & Matus, 2003). The authors of this survey recognized that the popular wisdom indicated that women among different generations held varying values, goals, and expectations. To their surprise, they discovered that the values, perspectives, and aspirations of the 571 women surveyed had more similarities across generations than differences(Merrill-Sands et al., 2003). Their report compiled results from a survey of 571 women, half of whom were between 35 and 49, 25% were over 50, and 25% were under 35. Their findings indicate that values held by women are unaffected by generation, some aspirations were common irrespective of birth cohorts, and experiences and expectations diverge across generations. Specifically, 88% of those surveyed cite the importance of a job that is intellectually stimulating, 85% view workplace flexibility as important, and 73% place value in a job where they 'help others' (Merrill-Sands et al., 2003). Although the report does not provide results broken down by the age groups, it seems evident from the high percentages represented in the responses that similar high percentages would be indicated in all age groups.

Finally, it may be relevant to examine the focus of the popular literature from the perspective of economic class. There is a school of thought that the popular classifications of generations and the related management advice for specific generations fails to focus on the lower classes (Embree, 2003). In his criticism of Lancaster and Stillman's book, Embree claims that little attention is placed on management of factory workers. Rather, he claims, the total focus is on managing middle class workers and assisting them in attaining management positions. While his criticisms may be oversimplifying the situation, it seems doubtful that Gen X workers holding low level positions in the service industry, for example, would be able to exert pressure on management in order to satisfy the expectation that they may learn skills that may be used to further their careers elsewhere. It seems apparent that the audience for such books as Lancaster and Stillman's is the manager who has invested in the selection, hiring, and training of skilled workers and who does not want to incur the cost of replacing them. However, workers from all social strata participate in the workforce. Whether the events that contributed to the formation of the generation units described in the popular literature were equally significant across social classes deserves closer examination. Unavailability of quality education to those class-challenged individuals may have limited their exposure to social events as well as the intellectual participation necessary for generational actualization and deterred their participation in social groupings where the generational unit is cemented.

TRAINING TECHNIQUES AND THE GENERATIONS

The topic of training is a critical area in the popular literature on generational differences. The need for training is amplified by the rapidly changing work environment where new technologies, markets, business strategies, and products emerge frequently. And employees recognize that, with the evolution of their workplace, training will help them keep up with their younger counterparts. Meanwhile, training is becoming vastly more accessible, from the expanded professional development offerings at colleges and universities to the growth of e-learning. Generational experts have addressed this topic extensively, identifying traits of the generations that may hinder or facilitate different methods of training. Yet training professionals have questioned the value of generational-based training methods (Anonymous, 2003; ODJFS, 2003; Schlichtemeier-Nutzman, 2001).

The popular literature claims that members of each generation are most comfortable with the training methods that were prevalent during their early days of work (Lancaster et al., 2002). Traditionalists learned from the school of hard knocks with little assistance from more experienced co-workers. Boomers were allowed selective training, with those identified as having potential receiving the additional training. Generation Xers demand training, and they leverage the added education into new career opportunities. With training delivery methods changing with technology and business demands, an analysis of the relevancy of generational differences to training techniques becomes critical.

The main question becomes which particular training method will appeal to the most employees and create the greatest business impact.

In her doctoral dissertation titled "Linearity Across Generations: An Exploratory of Training Techniques," Sue Schlichtemeier-Nutzman examined thirty-four training approaches with respect to preferences by generation (Schlichtemeier-Nutzman, 2001). She found that while some differences existed between generations, all three of the generations surveyed – Veterans, Boomers, and Gen X – preferred linear training techniques, or those that are broken down into components and applied step-by-step. Members of those generations also agreed on which techniques they considered to follow a linear approach. Further, her research indicates that there were greater differences regarding training preferences within generations and among sexes than between generations (Schlichtemeier-Nutzman, 2001). In her opinion, such similarities of training preferences between the generations allows HR professionals to apply uniform techniques based on the context of the workplace rather than the generational makeup of the workforce.

A relevant publication by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health addressed two major issues surfaced in this thesis (Mallett, Reinke, & Brnich Jr., 2002). First, the report challenged the focus on white-collar occupations inherent in the popular generational literature. The authors recognized the caution required in applying the learning expectations found in the popular literature to the unique case of training miners; survey results were required to determine the specific training preferences of this class of workers. Second, the report challenges the expectation held by Gen X and Gen Y that employers provide high technology work solutions. The cautious approach recommended by the authors was supported by results of a National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health study of miner training preferences (Mallett et al., 2002).

The 2001 study performed by NIOSH evaluated training preferences of 88 miners identified as members of either Gen X or Gen Y. Given a list of ten training methods, including one technology-intensive method (computer-based training), the miners were asked to choose the three that they felt would best assist them in the learning process as well as the three that they enjoyed the most. A strict adherence to the popular literature would expect to see a majority in favor of computer-based training. After all, it's been called 'fast paced and entertaining, and effective with Gen Whys,' even for those at entry level, such as grocery store clerks (Chester, 2002). The results indicated the opposite – computer based training was chosen by only 3.6% as the preferred mode, and by only 15.5% as the method they most enjoyed. 'Hands-on practice in a classroom or lab' was chosen as both the most enjoyed (by 42.9% of those surveyed) and the most effective method (by 61.9% of respondents) (Mallett et al., 2002). Further research may determine if the desire for high tech training methods is particular to white collar within Gen X and Gen Y, or if the divergence from recommendations of popular literature results from an overstatement of the expectation of such training methods.

Similar conclusions were made in a study by the State of Ohio (ODJFS, 2003). Theorizing that older generations may be at a disadvantage when utilizing e-learning, the surveyors looked at comfort in using a computer, using the Internet, using CD-ROM, and participating in an Online Training Class to learn new information. Under the assumption that the technological literacy level of Gen X and Gen Y would allow those generations a significant advantage in adapting to e-learning, the surveyors were looking for a positive correlation between age and comfort with e-learning (ODJFS, 2003). The results of the study indicated that age was less of a factor than previous experience in using electronic media for training. This indicates that the membership in a generation unit has less to do with training than years of experience in a specific position.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis was initiated by an interest in finding methods of motivating young employees, all members of Generation Y, to perform at a higher level. A second objective was to find suitable training techniques, complementary to their generational expectations, in order to ensure that they possess the tools to attain higher levels of performance. An analysis of Mannheim's theory of generational actualization and the formation of

generation units indicated some validity for basing HR methods on birth cohorts.

Applying the theory of generations to the contemporary American workforce uncovered several distinct qualities about each of the birth cohorts popularized in books and magazines. One could see how individuals of specific birth cohorts could identify with others who shared experiences surrounding significant historical and social events and movements. The popular literature made it easy to understand how those shared experiences may lead to common values and attitudes. By transferring those traits to the workforce, one can follow the progression to the establishment of what individuals of each generation expect from their employer. Those expectations lead to specific motivators to perform – key behaviors on the part of employers that will most significantly trigger positive work outcomes. The whole process of establishing generational identity seems to flow logically. However, it was difficult to reconcile the questions that were raised by many researchers concerning generational characteristics.

The treatment of gaps between generations as well as the acknowledgement of the existence of subdivisions in generations was not a major challenge to the generational theory. Those issues seemed to result from the desire to keep the generational picture neat and tidy. However, if the literature portrayed too many generations, identity would have blurred somewhat and the intended readers – managers – would have faced the prospect of adapting their skills to address the expectations of a multitude of birth cohorts. Although inconvenient, this factor does not cause the generational approach to become irrelevant. However, further criticisms do present serious challenges to the popular literature.

The issue of whether generations are homogeneous or heterogeneous strikes at the foundation of generational identity. If the heterogeneous aspect of generations is significant, then it becomes difficult to believe that enough members of that generation have developed shared social consciousness of a sufficient level to form an identity. There is a convincing argument that such factors as race, gender, and where an individual grew up will impact the potential for becoming a member of a generation unit. Each of those factors alone would potentially affect actualization; the aggregate effect of such major groups of society forming differing frames of reference regarding historical and social events is probably enough to impact the size of generation units.

The school of thought that constant social development continues through one's life further raises doubts about a generational identity forming during early years. People change during their lives. Sometimes, it is due to social or historical events, and sometimes it is just due to personal tragedy, family influence, individual growth and maturity, and sometimes from all of the above. Goals and expectations change as well, whether because of positions or stages in life or because a partner influences and stimulates changes. And change of any sort may be enough to create inconsistencies in the cookie-cutter description of generations.

Research indicating that there is little correlation between training techniques and generations seems to further support the argument that these birth cohorts are not relevant. If the members of Generation X, the Baby Boomer Generation, and the Veterans Generation do not have distinctive training expectations then there is reason to question whether they have any group consciousness.

The entrance of a new, and huge, birth cohort, Generation Y, into the workforce will certainly stimulate more popular literature. There is certainly room for argument that this group may initially have certain shared values and attitudes due to shared social events and responses. However, the rapid growth of technology and the trend towards globalization will have an impact; technology may create new social impacts and involvement of global workforces with American workers will blend in workers with completely different backgrounds. And as the group continues to welcome new members with diverse backgrounds based on race or origin, the commonalities will weaken and potentially dissolve. As this occurs, human resource professionals may find that the best course to follow is to design strategies that consider diversity and the context of the work environment rather than the birth cohorts of employees.

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