

## The Influence of Generations On Career Choice (Social Cognitive Career Theory Perspective)

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the influence of generations on career choice based on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). Our literature studies conclude that individual's career choice will be highly related to the major characteristics and values from his generation. Individual from the Traditional Generations will tend to choose careers which provide firm loyalty as his personal accomplishment, whether individual from Baby Boomers will tend to choose careers which provide prestiges, facilities, and positions. The X Generation lay their personal accomplishments on freedom and balance between career and family. Y Generation which known as digital natives tend to choose careers which give them freedom and creativity to work by utilizing high technology. Similiar to their former, the Z Generation not only tend to choose careers which give them freedom and creativity but also expect feedback from the experienced people.

**Keywords:** Generation, Career, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

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### Introduction

The examination of generational differences among workers is a critical and underdeveloped area of inquiry for management research. Ultimately, all organizations are influenced by the values and preferences of their next generation, as managers attempt to adapt and groom future leaders in a reciprocal process with implications for a firm's culture, ethical issues, and human resource policies and procedures (Judge & Bretz, 1992; Dose, 1997; Jurkiewicz). Failure on the part of managers to understand and adjust appropriately to generational differences and the demands of new generations entering the workplace can result in misunderstandings, miscommunications, and mixed signals, and can affect employee productivity, innovation, and corporate citizenship, ultimately resulting in problems with employee retention and turnover (Fyock, 1990; Kupperschmidt, 2000 as cited in Wsterman & Yamamura, 2007).

Research also suggests that differences between generations in the workforce can be a significant source of conflict in organizations (e.g. Adams, 2000; Bradford, 1993; Jurkiewicz, 2000; Karp et.al., 1999; O'Bannon, 2001). A study by the Society for Human Resource Management found that 58 percent of human resource professionals reported observing conflict among employees as a result of "generational" differences (as cited in Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). An understanding of the differences between and relationships among the preferences and motivators of generations and associated work outcomes can be used as an important building block in the development of effective recruitment materials, training methods, hiring processes, and benefits packages (Leschinsky & Michael, 2004).

Smola & Sutton (2002), who examined the differences in value sets between generations concluded that work values are more influenced by generational experiences than by age and maturation. Related to the importance of work environment fit, experts have suggested that one of the most important tasks in psychology may be to examine the individual's perceptions of the outer world in interaction with their expectations about environments (Magnusson, 1981 & Caplan, 1987 as cited in Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). There are many studies prove that variables in the work environment impact employee behavior (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982; Kyriakidou & Ozbilgin, 2004; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2002; Olson & Borman, 1989; Peters et.al., 1985). Early research on needs-pressure theory (Murray, 1938), field theory (Lewin, 1943), occupational choice (Holland, 1966), and the theory of work adjustment (Dawis, 1994) revealed the belief that employee behaviors do not occur in a vacuum, but in a specific and unique work environment. People placed in work environments that "fit" are more likely to intrinsically enjoy their work. The reverse is true for those placed in work environments that do not "fit". For these employees, normal daily work occurrences may be unpleasant and interpreted more negatively, thus resulting in negative outcomes such as boredom, poor work performance, and lack of satisfaction (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007).

Those studies above have been proven that generations can be a significant factor which influence career decision making and career development of individuals. Thus, it is necessary to explore the dynamic of generations variable on career decision making and development. The purpose of this article is to explain the influence of generations variable on career, specifically subtheme about individual's career decision making.

## **Discussion**

### **The purpose Definition and Characteristics of Generations**

A generation is defined as an identifiable group that shares birth years and significant life events at critical developmental stages (Kupperschmidt, 2000). A generational group includes those who share historical or social life experiences, the effects of which are relatively stable over their lives. These experiences influence a person's feelings toward authority and organizations, what a person values from work, and how a person plans to satisfy those desires (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998; Kupperschmidt, 2000).

Generations comprise of Traditional, Baby Boomers, X Generation, Y Generation, and Z Generation. Clause (2015) defined Traditionalists as people who were born 1900-1945 and comprise the oldest generation in American culture. The term "Traditionalist" is often associated with a variety of other generational terms, including Radio Babies, Builders, Industrialists, The Silent Generation, and World War II Generation (Buahene & Kovary, 2003; Kane, 2015). Many of these generational references related to world events, inventions, and creations that occurred during the timeframe, such as invention of the radio. Typically, Traditionalists respect authority and possess family values that keep their work and family lives separate. Generally motivated by money and position like their Baby Boomer children, Traditionalists take pride in being self-sacrificing and thrifty. They tend to work hard from a sense of pride and determination, consider debt or obligation to be embarrassing, and acknowledge that change

comes slowly. According to Kane (2015), Traditionalists describe themselves with two words—loyal and disciplined—and view education to be a dream. They reportedly learn best through traditional, instructor-led instruction; generally prefer tangible items for recognition or reward, such as certificates, plaques, or trophies; and seek to feel supported and valued by their employers and supervisors.

Human resources expert Heathfield (2015) defined Baby Boomers (Boomers) as the generation of Americans born in a baby boom following World War II, 1946-1964. Boomers have had good health, constitute the wealthiest generation, and optimistically view the world as improving over time. Robinson (2015) noted that Boomers grew up in a time of prosperity and an absence of world wars, although they experienced the Cold War era of living in fear of a Russian nuclear attack, building bomb shelters, and hiding under desks at school as drill practice. Kane (2015) noted that Boomers are generally well established in their careers and hold positions of power and authority. Loretto (2015) and Kane (2015) characterized Boomers as being extremely hard workers and very committed to their personal and professional goals. Motivated by perks, prestige, and position (3Ps), Boomers are described as work-centric, independent, goal-oriented, and competitive, typically equating their work and positions with self-worth. Boomers strive for authority and work prioritization, and they do expect to be valued and rewarded. Boomers' strong work ethic and take-charge attitudes have pushed many to very responsible positions that they do not want to relinquish, as they see their identities are tied to their work.

Robinson (2015) defined Generation X as the generation born after the Western Post-World War II Baby Boom; birth dates range from 1961-1981, and current ages range from 34 to 54. Originally called "Gen Bust" (Schroer, 2015) because their birth rate was vastly smaller than that of the preceding Baby Boomers, Generation X is associated with a variety of terms including Gen X, Gen X'ers, Post-Boomers, Twenty-Something's, and Baby Busters. Schroer (2015) noted that they are sometimes referred to as the "lost" generation—the first generation of "latchkey" kids exposed to lots of daycare and divorce. Gen X, for the most part, had parents who were Boomers and, as children, Gen X often experienced broken families and absentee parents. Where families remained intact, parents of Gen X individuals were often workaholics driven by personal gratification, authority, and rankings (Loretto & Kane, 2015). Schroer (2015) noted that Gen X individuals are starting to form families with higher levels of caution and pragmatism than their parents demonstrated. Gen X are engaging in financial planning, avoiding broken homes, and ensuring that children grow up with a parent available. In 2012, "The Generation X Report" (based on annual surveys used in the Longitudinal Study of today's adults) found that Gen X are highly educated, active, balanced, happy, and family oriented (Swanbrow, 2012). This report dispelled the materialistic, slacker, disenfranchised stereotypes often associated with Gen X 1970s and 1980s youth.

Gen X employees typically expect to maintain a balance between work and family life and do not work exceptionally long hours for money or titles (Leibow, 2014). Gen X are generally less loyal to their employers and are more comfortable demanding flexible work arrangements. At work, Gen X are pragmatic and direct, expect change, and also require some flexibility in rules and workplace regulations. Gen X watched their Boomer parents get laid off and have grown to expect and embrace change, which has resulted in their being more independent, more apt to job hop to increase marketability, and more likely to see their work-and-life balance as extremely important (Leibow, 2014). Workers in this generation are likely to question policies and projects; therefore, those who lead and supervise Gen X must provide credible reasons for tasks, decisions, and procedures, as well as insure opportunities for them to provide input due to their likelihood of questioning policies and projects (Leibow, 2014).

Gen X are described as geeks, independent thinkers, and artists who prefer to be fast-paced, engaged in interesting work, and efficient because they value their personal time and enjoy working

on self-directed or independent projects (Grimes, 2015). Gen X workers resist micromanaging bosses and find them to be distasteful and undesirable; they find informal policies on dress codes and workplace habits or formalities to be fun and motivating. Gen X expect freedom and balance in their personal and workplace lives—work is only a portion of the quality of the life they possess and seek to achieve (Grimes, 2015).

Generation Y is also referred to as Gen Y, Echo Boomers, Millennials or Millennials, Generation We, Internet Generation, Connect 24/7, and Leave No One Behind (Schroer, 2015). Born 1980-1990s, Gen Y number 71 million and constitute the largest generational cohort group since the Boomers. This generation is also web savvy and highly connected via social media. They have been raised at a time of constant information about world events as they connect with technology, including computers, the Internet, mobile phones, and so forth. Compared to members of other generations, Gen Y tend to be more social and confident as they seek personal and work-life balance (Gibson, 2015). They are generally less independent, more inclusively community oriented, and seek a sense of meaning in greater contexts. Gen Y had parents who were more available to them than Gen-X individuals; however, Gen Y expect more supervision and feedback, clear goals, structure, and mentoring (Gibson, 2015).

Driven by technology, Gen Y expect to multitask and approach projects from a variety of creative vantage points. Although easily bored, Gen Y typically enjoy experimenting and discovering new approaches and solutions to issues and problems as they are motivated by their need for a sense of purpose and belonging to meaningful communities. Gen Y generally seek independent learning that implements thorough and comprehensive online research; and, when recognized as students or employees, they prefer certificates or monetary rewards to indicate that they and their work are supported and valued by supervisors and employers. Gen Y are attracted to companies and businesses that embrace technological advancements that have changed the way of doing business globally. Gen Y are making a significant move from traditional forms of employment to self-employment because they are very entrepreneurial—engaging in multiple jobs with diverse career paths (Gibson, 2015).

Generation Z is the latest generation and will be leading the world in several decades. Schroer (2015) stated that Generation Z members were born 1995-2015 and currently constitute a rapidly growing population of 23 million. Varied names have been suggested to be associated with this generational group, including Generation Z, Gen Z, Zs, Gen Z'ers, iGeneration, Gen Tech, Gen Wii, Net Gen, Digital Natives, Gen Next, Post Gen, and Plurals (Menzies, 2015; Schroer, 2015). Most of the traits that will define this generation have yet to emerge; however, many are highly connected to having the lifelong use of communication and technology such as the World Wide Web, instant messaging, text messaging, MP3 players, mobile phones, and tablets. Such technological connections have earned this generation the name “digital natives” (Horovitz, 2012).

Many of the earliest Gen Z (1995-2000 birthdates) are beginning to enter the workforce, and they are typically tech savvy; socially connected to their peers through social media; bright, with IQ scores higher than previous generations; and generally accepting of diverse populations (Renfro, 2015). With regard to schooling, Renfro (2015) noted that this is the most home-schooled generation in the modern public school era (1920-today) and that Gen Z typically require less direction because they have ready access to digital tools that enable them to think they can do anything. Renfro (2015) described Gen Z learners as driven by graphics, disliking lecture-test classrooms, expecting instant feedback, and preferring customized learning. Renfro (2015) also noted that 65% of grade-school students today will work in jobs that do not currently exist. Gen Z will be different types of professionals: not 40-hour per week cubicle workers, but freelance contractors with great flexibility, who solve problems with particular expertise. Otherwise, members of the other generations must be able to deal with and adjust to Gen Z's changing (or missing) social skills that are being driven by advancing technologies.

### **The Implication of Generational Differences on Work-Environment Fit**

Existing generational research indicates that a differential sensitivity to work environment fit between the generations is likely to exist. For example, research by Smola & Sutton (2002) indicated that younger employees were “less loyal to the company”. As a result, younger employees may take the view that nothing is permanent, and may disproportionately emphasize the importance of work environments that match their preferences. They may become more dissatisfied and more willing to leave if these work environment preferences are not actualized. During the internet boom of the late 1990s, work environment was a key factor in high technology firms’ recruiting and retention strategies, including diverse incentives ranging from casual dress and flexible work schedules to game rooms with ping-pong tables.

Research by Smola & Sutton (2002) also indicated that younger generation employees desired to be promoted more quickly than their older counterparts (indicating high expectations for job challenge, success, and accomplishment). As a result, an employee’s goal orientation fit (i.e. his/her desire for a work environment providing suitable levels of job challenge, participation, and strong expectations for accomplishment) is likely to be more strongly connected to satisfaction and intention to remain with an organization for younger generation employees.

With the increasingly transitory nature of work, the reduction in lifelong employment and the increase in part-time and contract work (Sonnenberg, 1997), younger generation employees are more likely to be aware of the need for constant skill development and updating (Hesketh & Bochner, 1993 as cited in Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). Rather than passively relying on employers to take responsibility for employee career development, younger generation employees are more likely to take a more active role in their career planning and execution. As a result, it is likely that if the younger generations’ preferences are not realized in the work environment, the impatience and increased mobility of younger generation employees will manifest itself in higher levels of dissatisfaction.

The advanced careers of Boomers, on the other hand, are likely to make them more entrenched within their organizations, while their age and family commitments may make them less mobile. In addition, their position as managers makes social interaction more important in achieving effective management. These factors may contribute to an increased need of Baby Boomers for social interaction and cohesion with cohorts. Meeting this need will, in turn, be important to Baby Boomers’ satisfaction.

Fit between the expectations for and the reality of an orderly, organized work environment, with clear expectations and control, may also differ between generations. Generation XY has been described as a “Nintendo Generation” in which work environment expectations can be described using a video game as a metaphor (Herman & Eckel, 2002). In this environment, player expectations are clear and well defined, behavior is continually measured, and players receive consistently high levels of feedback on their performance, which motivates continuing effort. Generation XY has grown up in an environment of instant gratification which they can tailor and structure to meet their desires, including quick access to money (ATMs), information (internet), entertainment and communication (television, computers, and cellphones), and even dating (online dating services). Unmet desires among the younger generation of workers for clear expectations and orderly, organized work environments that more closely resemble the structured and controlled media environments in which they have spent such large amounts of time may result in lower levels of satisfaction and intention to remain with a firm.

In particular, in a multigenerational workforce, leaders must facilitate knowledge transfer among workers to optimize performance and success as well as workers’ satisfaction and rewards. Accordingly, leaders must devote time and planning to assess the most available knowledge, understand who holds key knowledge, and consider various methods of knowledge-transfer so the

desired knowledge is converted and transferred to best serve a multigenerational workforce (Stevens, 2010).

### **Analysis of Career Choice Based on SCCT**

The phenomenon of multigenerational labor provides new challenges in the world of career. Differences in the values and objectives of each generation can influence the individual's career choice. Therefore, in analyzing the individual's process of selecting a career, a counselor need to use a comprehensive theory. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) is a fairly recent approach to understanding the career puzzle. It is intended to offer a unify-ing framework for bringing together common pieces, or elements, identified by previous career theorists—such as Super, Holland, Krumboltz, and Lofquist and Dawis—and arranging them into a novel rendering of how people (1) develop vo-cational interests, (2) make (and remake) occupational choices, and (3) achieve varying levels of career success and stability (Lent, 2005). SCCT is a highly relevant theory for discussing the effect of generations on career choice because it is designed to understand the career development of diverse subjects (including students and labor) and consider some influencing factors such as race / ethnicity, culture, gender, socio-economic status, age, and disability status.

SCCT attempts to explain the development of interests, educational and career choices, and performance and persistence in education and work. The theory suggests that self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations both predict academic and occupational interests. Self-efficacy beliefs are defined as 'people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and exe-cute courses of action required to attain designated levels of performance' (Bandura, 1986). Outcome expectations are seen as 'personal beliefs about probable response outcomes' (Lent et. al., 1994: 83).

Understanding the sources of self-efficacy is particularly important in career counselling, as they can be used to inform the design of career interventions. Bandura (1997) proposes that these sources are performance accomplishments (i.e. experiences of successful performance of a particular behaviour), vicarious learning or modelling, low levels of anxiety, encouragement and support from others. According to SCCT individual career choices are preceded by several subprocesses, such as the development of self efficacy, expectations of outcomes, interests, and skills in different job domains. Those subprocesses will produce and form a specific career path. Once a career choice has been made then it will be the subject of the matter in the future to be revised because the individual and the environment are dynamic entities.

Both self-efficacy and outcome expectations affect individual career interests. Then he will develop a career goal that congruent to his interests. The career goals will then motivate individual to take action or efforts to achieve those goals (such as finding a necessary training, applying for a specific job, etc.). These actions and efforts will be followed by successes or failures that will subsequently affect the individual's self-efficacy. Therefore, self-efficacy and outcome expectations do not appear in vacuum social space nor the only factor that shapes career interests, preferences, and individual performance. Both works within the context of internal and external factors (such as gender, race / ethnicity, genetics, health, disability, and socio-economic status). All these factors play an important role in individual career development.

Regarding the influence of generations on career choice, SCCT provides a perspective based on specific self-efficacy beliefs of each generation. Due to period differences, the values adopted between one generation with another generation have been resulted in different personal accomplishments. The Traditional generation underlie loyalty to their leaders or superiors as their main personal accomplishment, while Baby Boomers rest theirs on prestige, facilities, and position at work. Thus, Baby Boomers generation are represented by a hard-working individual who always wants to be respected and to reach the top position of his career.

The X Generation have different source of self-efficacy than the elders. The X Gen do not lay his personal accomplishment on prestige, facilities, nor positions. Otherwise they expect a balance between family and work as their main personal accomplishment. Born from Boomers parents who tend to workaholic, the Gen X individuals do not want their children to feel the same pain. Generation X are portrayed as person who have less loyalty to their boss and reject a micromanaging boss. However, they are known as a critical individual who wants to be involved in his company policy making process.

Generation Y consist of people who grew at the beginning of advanced technological civilization. Driven by the development of cutting-edge technology, Generation Y expect multitasking works and projects that provide a large portion of creativity for them. Just like their former (Gen X), the Y Generation expect a balance between family and work as their personal accomplishments and also a freedom of expression and creativity. As technological advances support the absurdity of space and time constraints, Generation Y is able to have multiple career paths and begin a career revolution by developing self-employment.

Generation Z are the latest generation and will lead the world in the next few decades. Generation Z are also known as digital natives because their life always driven by technology. Personal accomplishment of individuals from Generation Z are similar to the Y Gen (e.g. freedom of expression and creativity) but accompanied with feedback from mentors of their work.

According to the above explanation, we can conclude that individual's career choice will be closely related to the dominant characteristics and values of his own generation. Individuals from the traditional generation will tend to choose a career that is able to provide a personal accomplishment of strong loyalty. Individuals of the Baby Boomers Generation tend to choose careers that are capable of providing personal accomplishments in the form of prestige, facilities, and positions. Unlike their parents, individuals from Generation X tend to choose careers that provide personal accomplishment in the form of freedom and balance between work and family. While Generation Y as the digital generation will tend to choose a career that provides personal accomplishment in the form of freedom to work and creativity by utilizing technological sophistication. Generation Z as the latest generation will soon tend to choose a career with a personal accomplishment similar to Y generation but also expect feedback from people who are more experienced.

Knowledge about different personal accomplishments as the most influential factor for shaping self-efficacy beliefs is very important for HRD practitioners. Because it provides an overview of the past and present career developments as well as predictions and anticipation for future career development. By providing this useful informations related to the dynamics of selection and career development, the HRD practitioners have been give positive impacts for their company's productivity.

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