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Bracing for the Multi-Generational Workforce: What We Need to Know**

Abstract

Workforce demographics have changed, and business leaders have started to question how to handle employees from different generations. With the noticeable generational divide, the issue of generational conflict is gaining prominence. Generational disagreement among employees is not new as each generation is shaped by different historical, socio-economic, and political events where each generation brings with them their unique perspective. Leaders in most organizations are aware of it, albeit few are willing to address such conflicts. Even if they do, uncertainties arise. These differences, or their unique generational characteristics, are due to the exposure to historical events during their early years. As most literature stems from the West and the historical events that happened are different, their characteristics may differ in terms of geography. An in-depth and practical understanding of generational dynamics could enhance the effectiveness of management in handling today's multi-generational workforce. Hence, this research aims to provide insights into the characteristics of Malaysian Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y who are working locally and comparing them with the West.

Keywords: baby boomers; characteristics; generation x; generation y; multi-generation
(JEL: J10, J11, J21, M00, M12)

Introduction

Malaysia inherited much of its management practice from the British. After gaining its independence, a distinctive mixture of Asian and western management was established through three main eras: post-independence era (1957–1970), New Economic Policy (NEP) era (1971–1990), and national development plan (1991 – present). Look East policy was adopted in the 1980s where Japan was used as a model for the country's economic growth (Wolfe & Arnold, 1994). It was an initiative to learn from them and contribute to Malaysia's economic and social development. Diffusion and harmonized management thinking from western countries were seen through the establishment of multinational companies in Malaysia, as

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** Date submitted: August 11, 2019
Revised version accepted after double-blind review: January 31, 2020

https://doi.org/10.5771/0935-9915-2020-3-324 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

well as sending Malaysian students to western universities while preserving cultural values.

A cohort does not constitute a generation by its age alone. Sociocultural experiences play a major role in shaping a generation (Katz, 2017; Pasi, Satu, Tiina, & Katri-Maria, 2017). As eventful factors in developing nations like Malaysia are different from the West, their characteristics may be different (Lee & Tay, 2012). Hence, instead of just adopting the practice, a business should look into its uniqueness and applicability. The business arena is becoming increasingly competitive and organizations are developing strategies to help in enhancing competitive advantage. To gain a competitive edge, organizations realize the need to pay more attention to the executors of any organization. In transforming the workforce, researchers and practitioners need to address differences in attitudinal outcomes among the generations of employees.

With the arrival of Generation Y, never before the workplace has been so diverse, with four different generations working side-by-side to achieve an organization's common goal. The generations are Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Though Silent Generation has passed their retirement age, there is still a handful of them at the workplace. Having a diverse workforce brings on more challenges to employers. The generational divide is not only a common phenomenon in the West but is also apparent in Malaysia. It is common to read about the generational gap in our local print media (Foong & Wong, 2009; Kam, 2012; Mohd Shahran, 2018; Santhiram, 2019; Soo, 2010). These gaps could be due to the different perspectives and behaviors of each generation.

Managing a diverse workforce can be very challenging for most corporations. Understanding the peculiarities of work behaviors and attitudes of employees is necessary to ensure harmony and cooperation among employees, as well as between the employees and the management. Howe and Strauss (1991), in particular, suggests that historical events, socio-economic, and political factors could shape the characteristics of each generation. Related literature shows that differences between the generations can lead to conflict (Adams, 2000; Holder & Lannon, 2018; Jurkiewicz, 2000; Kupperschmidt, 2000). Kupperschmidt (2000) suggests that understanding these differences may be a managerial tool for better employee productivity. However, most of these studies of the characteristics were documented in developed countries (Debra, Kenneth, & Terry, 2008; Diane, 2000; Jim Jenkins, 2019; Ridley, 2004). Although there is currently 15.75 million labor force in Malaysia, they represent at least three generational cohorts (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019c), as compared to 12 million in the year 2012 census (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2012), not much is known about them. Latest available statistics show that there are 32.6 million citizens without a clear breakdown of generation (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019a). Though economies in developing countries like Malaysia may be affected by the developed nations, Malaysians still

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went through different historical, socio-economic, and political events that shaped them. World historical events such as World War may have a strong influence on Malaysians, which, together with other local events, inevitably shaped them. On the other hand, events such as the assassination of J.F.K. Kennedy and Moon Landing recorded as salient events for the American Baby Boomers (Dries, Pepermans, & De Kerpel, 2008), may have little impact/influence or insignificant to Malaysians. Some may argue that the world is getting flatter where management practices can be applied cross-culture but cultural values are the best predictors of many outcomes at the workplace (Taras, Steel, & Kirkman, 2011). In addition, despite being in the electronic age, generations are still nationally bounded entities (Edmunds & Turner, 2005). Thus, the primary aim of this research is to understand the characteristics of each generation in the Malaysian context and comparing these with the related literature from the West, only then can strategies be developed to ensure harmony at the workplace rather than just adopting it blindly.

A generation relates to both year and age. As defined by Kupperschmidt (2000), generation refers to an identifiable group based on birth year and hence shares major life events that happened during their formative years. A generation or cohort generally covers a period of twenty years (Sayers, 2007). In retrospect, a generation is a group of people with approximately the same age who have succumbed to the same historical life events or circumstances within that period. The importance of historical events was also stressed by generation socialists, Mannheim (1997). After completing their secondary education, they leave school and enter the workforce, build their career and settle down, start their families, and, or retire about the same time.

The concept of generation is used worldwide though the operationalization of the demographic cohort remains inconclusive. It is difficult to have a fixed birth year range for each generation but the grouping of these generations has been followed through by researchers across western and Asia. A generation is a group of people born around the same time. For example, Generation Y (born between 1981 and 2001) is the largest group after the Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), and the youngest of all at the workplace (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Statistics show that the number of Generation Y entering the workforce is three times the number of those who were born between 1965 and 1980 or better known as Generation X (Gogoi, 2005; Ng, 2010). This number continues to grow a lot faster than other generations (Dries et al., 2008). A similar trend can be seen in Malaysia where the latest available statistics show that a youthful workforce, viz Generation Y, is becoming part of a workforce that consists of four generations of employees – the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Generation Y represents a big portion of the population (Population Pyramid, 2019) and workforce pie and their numbers are growing steadily (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2012). The entrance of Generation Y in the Malaysian workforce environment has not only

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added to the diversity at the workplace but also contributed to the issue of the generational divide.

About 34 % of the Malaysian workforce are from Generation Y in the year 2010 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010), and this percentage rose to 44 %, out of the earlier mentioned 12 million economically active individuals in the year 2012 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2012). With the increasing number of Generation Y employees in the workforce, the gap in work attitudes and behavior characteristics between the younger and older generation continues to widen. Some older generations have intuitively and sometimes unfairly described the younger generation as different and vice versa (Lesser & Rivera, 2006). However, these problems that arise from generational differences cannot be resolved overnight. If resentment between the older and younger generations, (as they differ in their work and life values), is not resolved amicably, there may be friction or chaos at the workplace. These cohorts, each with their peculiar characteristics are now working side-by-side; requiring today's business leaders to re-examine how to respond effectively to the specific needs of each generation to motivate them, avoid conflicts between them, and improve understanding between the generations for better functioning and more profitable organizations. A better understanding of values and beliefs held by each generation is needed through systematic research, providing additional knowledge related to the values of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. This study expects to give insights into the characteristics of each generation, for a more harmonious way of establishing working relationships for all.

Millennial or Generation Y, born between 1981 and 2001, is generally optimistic, enjoys teamwork, the most educated of all, civic-minded, and confident. Generation X frequently referred to as Baby Boomers' children born between 1965 and 1980, mostly from dual-income families with growing divorce rates, which makes them more independent and self-reliant (Howe & Strauss, 2007). The Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, are socially mature, demonstrate strong work ethics, and high on job involvement (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Silent Generation born between 1925 and 1945, prefers job security over entrepreneurship, cautious, unadventurous, facilitators, trendsetters, and inward-focused (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000).

While it is important not to stereotype individuals because of age groupings, it is imperative to understand the characteristics, values, and strengths that each generation has. Acknowledgement of these generational differences can improve the work environment and thus minimize disagreement at work or workplace conflict. Bearing this in mind and in addition to the fact that more research was carried out in the West, this paper hopes to contribute to the body of knowledge on generation in Asia. For the sake of practicality, this research emphasizes an understanding of the characteristics to enable different generations to work cohesively. As per Crumpack-

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er and Crumpacker (2007), understanding of generational values and attitudes in the workplace can be strategically useful for organizations.

As work profiles are no longer similar across cohorts, indicating that it may not operate in the same manner across groups (Kicheva, 2017; Meriac, Woehr, & Banister, 2010) and are motivated differently (Kultalahti, 2014; Lee, Jayasingam, & Mohd Zain, 2018), this paper seeks to contribute to the theoretical and practical body of knowledge by examining the generational differences and the strategic implications for management in the current dynamic workplace comprising three generations. When it comes to these differences, the study sets out to identify the work values, work expectations, work behaviors, goals, and leadership styles of each generation in the Malaysian context, which is in line with the theory of generations of Karl Mannheim, which was translated into English in 1952 and mentioned again in his collection of work in 1997. According to Mannheim's theory, people are significantly influenced by the socio-historical environment and these environments vary geographically. The theories were criticized for focusing on western ideas and lacks a broader cultural understanding. These generational work characteristics were then compared with the literature of the West. In this research, it is assumed that all participants are rational, and some core characteristics are set for life, but people may change their beliefs and attitudes along the way due to later life experiences.

Literature Review

This section provides an overview of the different characteristics of each generation which are defined with cohorts. These differences in terms of work and life values, as well as differences in terms of preferences, which result in variation in behavioral patterns (Smola & Sutton, 2002). The researchers concluded that the differences, in terms of dimensions of the construct, were attributable more to cohort effects than age across samples collected between 1974 and 1999. Generational concerns have become part of us. As mentioned by Mannheim (1970), the problem merits serious attention. Organizations need to deal with diversity, otherwise, they might face intergenerational conflict (Steane & Christie, 2001). Recognition of these generational variations can enhance the work atmosphere and thus lessen conflict at work (Tay, 2011). Business leaders need to connect and relate to employees and understanding what matters to them is necessary to achieve organizational performance.

Characteristics of Each Generation

Workplace diversity brings on new challenges. Generational issues have become part of our lives. This research focuses on the characteristics of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Y as there is only a minority in Silent Generation who are still working through passed retirement age. Despite some inconsistencies in the birth years of each generation, most western authors provide almost similar descriptions of each cohort.

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Baby Boomers

Baby Boomers, the second generation in the workforce, also known as Boomers or Me Generation, were born into the world that was just getting over the two world wars (Elsdon & Lyer, 1999). They were born from the year 1946 to 1964 (J. Jenkins, 2008), and they perceive long hours and punctuality as a sign of dedication. This is the generation where they work to live (Berkup, 2014). To them, their minds are all set to strive to work resulting in a high level of faithfulness. Due to their numbers, they have to compete for jobs throughout their lives and this makes them a generation that is easy to please (Elsdon & Lyer, 1999). They value loyalty and commitment (Bano, Vyas, & Gupta, 2015).

It is with the end of the two world wars that mark postmodernist attitudes. Heroes of Baby Boomer generation no longer were the military leaders of the Second World War but leaders such as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Martin Luther King (Zemke et al., 2000). As a result of postmodernism, they are free from terrorism and the start of economic expansionism (Crampton & Hodge, 2007). Thus, they are optimistic by nature and their strong focus on diligence and achievement may mean that this group has difficulty in balancing work and family lives (Dilworth & Kingsbury, 2005).

This is also the generation that has been exposed to a wide variety of training programs as the economy progresses through the industrial economy, service economy, and now knowledge economy, where different skills were acquired. They have gone through Theory X, control and supervision of the industrial economy; followed by Theory Y, relationship during service economy; and now, collaborative leadership (Yu & Miller, 2005).

Eighty million Americans were born and they comprise 45 % of the workforce (Dries et al., 2008), denoting a population spike in reaction to the two World Wars, thus, the name Baby Boomers. According to the Labor Force Survey Report Malaysia (2017), there were approximately 11 % of Baby Boomers in the Malaysian workforce.

Generation X

Generation X, also known as X-ers, or 13th Generation born from the year 1965 to 1980 and also the middle child of generations (Kane, 2019). They look for flexibility and values fun and balance in life (Cordeniz, 2002). They are devoted to themselves rather than their employers; they have a preference to work for themselves as they see their parents being laid off, where they learned that sacrifice does not necessarily ensure stable family life and permanent employment (Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008). They have a survivor mentality and value individualism (Kane, 2019); this is also the generation where society blames them for social ills, which caused

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them to be more cynical and independent. Conditioned by these social ills, they trust their judgment and thus self-reliance is their trait (Sayers, 2007).

Despite being in prime working age, their numbers are still insufficient to replace the aging and retiring workforce-the Boomers (Bridgers & Johnson, 2006). This makes it more crucial to have a better understanding of their characteristics. Many of them were raised in a single-parent home or had both parents working. In addition, this is the first generation who grow up with personal computers at the information age (Alverson, 1999). They are more self-reliant than their successors due to the strong influence of social changes in areas such as finance, family, and social insecurity (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). This generation is the first that breaks Maslow's hierarchy. Among the 46 million Americans born, 30 % are in the workforce (Dries et al., 2008; Eisner, 2005). As far as Malaysia is concerned, the workforce consists of 38 % Generation X (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2012).

Generation Y

Generation Y, the youngest cohort in the working world; also called Millennial, Internet Generation, Generation Next or Net Generation (Glass, 2007), dot.com generation (Yu & Miller, 2005) or N-Geners (Tapscott, 1998) or first digital natives (Abrams & Von Frank, 2014). Generation Y desires a work-life balance, or to reflect more accurately, it is a life-work balance as this group sees life coming first. They want more "me time" at work (Time Magazine, 2013). As Yi, Ribbens, and Morgan (2010) put it, they want more freedom and their career choice is based on interest and personality. This generation always finds ways to improve their careers (Kane, 2019).

Like their Generation X siblings, Generation Y is independent (Gasper, 2018), entrepreneurial and demands immediate feedback (Martin, 2005). They would rather send a quick email than to have face-to-face communication, like Baby Boomers, which may hinder a personal relationship with their colleagues, supervisors, direct reports, and clients (Glass, 2007).

Methodology

Seventy participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. Only Malaysians working locally in the Klang Valley aged 16 and above were considered as this is the minimum legal working age in Malaysia. As Klang Valley is centrally located in the vicinity of the capital of Malaysia, many come from different states in Malaysia to work here. Silent Generation was excluded as only a few of them are still in employment albeit passed retirement age.

Sampling is by stratified random sampling to have equal representation from each generation and to reduce bias. Griffin and Hauser (1993) stated that 30 participants are a reasonable starting point for deciding a qualitative sample size to reveal

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the full range or nearly full range of potentially important perceptions. In addition, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) found that saturation occurs within the first twelve interviews. Methods used in this research have been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and they were informed of the expected duration to complete the interview and their rights to withdraw from participation at any point in time at the beginning of the interview. Participants were from various industries.

Before the actual research, a pilot test on the interview guidelines was conducted to ensure that all questions are comprehensible and not biased. The participants were assured that there is no "right" or "wrong" answer to the question and it is all about their perception. The interview guidelines were developed based on the literature gathered from the Silent Generation to Generation Z. These characteristics listed in the literature were used as a guide and participants were free to state other characteristics pertinent to them.

A pilot test of 10 participants was randomly chosen from all generations. Participants were allowed to comment on the clarity and relevance of the various statements. Feedback obtained from the pilot test allows the researcher the final opportunity to make changes (Robson, 2002). The results of the pilot study found that only minor improvement was necessary.

Several steps were taken to reduce method bias. Participants were assured that there are no right or wrong answers and they should answer the questions as honestly as possible. They were also assured that only aggregate data will be reported as it reduces the likelihood of participants giving socially desirable responses or consistent with what they think the researcher had wanted them to be (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). To reduce moderator bias, no opinions were given to the participants throughout the interview session.

The interviewees were asked to describe their work values, expectations, behaviors, goals, and leadership styles. They were also asked about their perception of their immediate supervisors in relation to the same work attributes. Interviewees were probed on the five elements-work values, expectations, behaviors, goals, and leadership styles. These elements were based on concepts drawn from various related works. Work values refer to principles or beliefs that describe the interviewees and their perception about his/her immediate supervisor. Work expectations are the things that they expect from the organization. Work behavior relates to the usual behavior one portrays at work. Goals in life refer to the things that they want/desire at the end of the day. They were also asked to elaborate to ensure both interviewer and interviewee get what is being said. They were free to list the attributes and were later given some assistance, by showing them a list of attributes attained from the literature with regard to the four generations. Attributes from the Silent Generation were included to examine for any deferred effect. With the list of attributes on hand, they were then asked if they wish to revisit the earlier mentioned attributes.

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These were then matched with the perceptions about the immediate supervisor with generation as the control to check on reliability. To facilitate this, they were asked to choose their age range and their respective supervisor's age range based on generation definition. Each in-depth interview took about an hour.

Content analysis was adopted in this study; a widely used method of qualitative research was used to provide insight into human interaction. Data cleansing includes examining, conceptualization, coding, and categorizing the data into concepts. Categorizing into concepts or searching out patterns includes immersing oneself in the data as recommended by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) to identify possible phenomena, inconsistencies and divergent views given by different generations. In addition, quasi-statistics were also used to analyze the characteristics of participants. This method is supported by prominent qualitative researchers such as Howard Becker and Martyn Hammersley, as it requires counting the number of times the event is mentioned. These simple counts of things in quasi-statistics are a legitimate and important sort of data for qualitative researchers and its value is more precise as claimed by Becker (1970). This is further supported by Maxwell (2010) as the use of numbers per se in qualitative data, does not make it mixed-method research.

Results and Discussion

Out of the 70 participants, 63 were usable, as seven withdrew from the study, yielding a response rate of 90 %, out of which, 21 were Baby Boomers with 57 % male, 22 Generation X with 41 % male, and 20 from Generation Y with 55 % male, which are quite similar to Malaysia's gender ratio of 107 males to 100 females (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019b). Baby Boomers consist of 44 % Malays, 46 % Chinese, 5 % Indians and 5 % from other races, while Generation X consists of 39 % Malays, 47 % Chinese and 14 % Indians. There were 50 % Malays, 30 % Chinese, 10 % Indians and 10 % from other races from Generation Y. As society places more emphasis on education, individuals from all three generations appear to be willing to invest their time and energy in obtaining higher education qualification. Study shows that the highest qualification attained for Baby Boomers are quite evenly spread as compared to other generations where the majority of them have attained at least a secondary school qualification, degree/professional qualification, and postgraduate, 24 % for each category. This shows that even after or while working, they have chosen to continue their tertiary level education. On the contrary, the majority of Generation X has at least a degree or holds a professional qualification (41 %). Similarly, the majority of Generation Y has either a pre-university qualification (35 %) with the aim of pursuing their education later, or currently a degree holder (45 %).

When it comes to the current position held, the majority of Boomers are Assistant Managers and above (62 %); and Non-executive (33 %) as those who are capable would have moved up to at least Assistant Manager level. Generation X, being in

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their prime working-age, comprised mainly of Assistant Manager and above (54 %), followed by Executive or Senior Executive (32 %) and Non-executive (14 %). The trend is reversed for Generation Y as they are still gaining work knowledge, and some have yet to complete their education or wish to further their studies later. The employment position data reflects the career stages these participants are at with regards to their age and is not in any way implicating the capabilities of the participants from a different generation.

A comparison in terms of tenure in the organization across generations revealed that the Boomers tend to stay longer within the organization as compared to the rest. This trend is in line with the report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) where the median tenure of younger employees aged 25 to 34 is 2.8 years. Besides having a lower willingness to quit among the Boomers, they have also been reported to have higher job satisfaction (Benson & Brown, 2011). The global voluntary turnover rate in 2016 was 9.6 % with a high turnover rate in finance (12.7 %) (Gutmann, 2016). As far as the Malaysian financial services industry is concerned, the turnover rate rose from 7.4 % in 2012 to 13.3 % in 2013 (Watson, October 2, 2013). One may argue that it is only natural for Generation Y to stay in an organization for less than a year, as they are still young, and some may not have decided on their career paths. However, a closer look at participants' demographic characteristics, they tend to stay in organizations from a year to less than three years. If we were to look at it holistically, employee turnover is not only a common phenomenon in the West but is also apparent in Asian countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan as reported by Chang (1996).

In-depth one-to-one interviews of 63 Malaysian employees from different organizations in Peninsular Malaysia showed that there are generational differences in the Malaysian context. Work characteristics were established upon considering and matching with what the interviewees reported and what they perceived of other cohorts. Similar characteristics can be seen across the West and Malaysia with some additional attributes. The findings of work-related characteristics for the three generations are categorized into work values, expectations, behaviors, goals, and leadership style. Comparisons were made with the West for the first four categories where similar characteristics and additional attributes were highlighted. A glance over these findings is summarized in table 1.

Work Values

Comparison to the West

Malaysia is currently placed at a transition period of the efficiency-driven economy to an innovation-driven economy as per The Global Competitiveness Report (2012–2013) Index, the highest-ranked competitive economies among the developing Asian countries (World Economic Forum, 2019). This transition period has its impact on the characteristics-the deferred characteristics. Deferred characteristics re-

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fer to characteristics that were reported in the generation that comes before them in the West. Loyalty, as an example, a trait identified for the Boomers and this matches the earlier tenure in the participants' demographics. Among the three generations in Malaysia, Baby Boomers are the ones who had gone through the hardest moments in their lives. They strived through the hard times of world wars, economic meltdown and witnessed Malaysia gained its independence (Lee & Tay, 2012). As they have experienced hardship, Boomers tend to focus on careers, as they believed that having a job itself is already a bonus. While, Generation X has the deferred characteristics of independence, as they are currently at their prime working age. Similarities with the western counterpart are seen in both Generation X and Y when it comes to work values. For example, Generation X portrays results-driven behavior and flexibility, while Generation Y is seen as a team player and confident in nature.

Malaysia

When it comes to Malaysia, there seem to be some characteristics that are similar across generations. All generations seem to be dedicated. Although some may argue that this work value should be slowly disappearing, these are viewed differently by each generation where they feel that they are still dedicated. In this aspect, it is also time to redefine this attribute according to the generation group. Leaders may ask each generation a direct question on what they think dedication means to them to avoid misunderstanding. For example, dedication for Boomers may mean dedication to the task alone. Dedication to Generation X and Y may mean, so long as they finish the work on time, they have the right to do other things in between the given tasks.

There are additional attributes that these generations portray. For example, when it comes to working values, Baby Boomers are independent. Some may argue that with due consideration given to their years of experience and the positions that they hold, they will inevitably want to be independent. If we were to examine it further, Generation X is at their prime working-age and some are already at middle management level or higher, and yet, this characteristic does not appear in their cohort. Despite being unfairly labeled by society, Generation X additional attributes are diligent and ambitious.

Work Expectations

Comparison to the West

Though the turnover rate is apparent in Malaysia, employees from all generations seem to expect some form of security from the employer. This attribute only appears in the Silent Generation from the West, but it is a crossover effect for all generations in Malaysia. With the existing attrition rate and continuing issues of talent shortages, perhaps, it is time for employers to reconsider permanent employment or

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longer contract terms, which is in line with the national average of employees changing jobs once every three years (Florida, 2009), with clear performance expectation where incompetent employees would be asked to leave.

Similar to the western literature, Generation X expects to be allowed to learn, assigned to challenging tasks, and work-life balance, from the employers. This is where they break the Maslow's hierarchy when they move to a more challenging job with the same pay or remuneration. What is unique to Malaysia is the spillover effect of these attributes among Generation Y.

Malaysia

Fairness at the workplace seems to be gaining its popularity especially when it comes to both Generation X and Y. They expect to be fairly rewarded. They would prefer a transparent reward system where guidelines are clearly defined and shared.

Work Behaviors

Comparison to the West

Similar work behavior includes result-focused for Generation X. Findings from the interview revealed that not only Generation Y multitasks, but Generation X also has similar work behavior. These similar characteristics from both Generation X and Y may be due to the recently coined term as global generations. If we were to examine the defining moments of Generation X, as people are said to resemble their times more than their parents, this generation mentioned that the birth of computers and the Internet as a major influence on their lives. The same goes for Generation Y where the Internet plays a major role in their day-to-day lives (Dries et al., 2008). Coupled with the increasing Internet usage in Malaysia, the increased access to information has created a heightened awareness, and thus inevitably shares similar characteristics in this borderless world. This could be the result of having 28.7 million Internet users in Malaysia (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2018), growth from 17.5 million users in 2011 (Wireless, 2011). In addition, the Internet World Stats (2019) reviewed that Internet penetration in Malaysia accounts for 81.2 % in the year 2019.

Malaysia

All generations seem to have respect for authority. This may be due to religion that emphasizes respect for status and authority. In addition to the above, each generation may interpret respect for authority differently. For example, the Boomers may mean having to address a person according to his or her position, and Generation X may find it sufficient to address them as Mr. or Ms. or just the name. Generation Y may find it adequate to say "Hi", to which others may feel, offended. Generally, power distance for the younger generation is low as compared to the older generation. Another reason for having these attributes across generations may be due to

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paternalistic management in Malaysia. It is a cultural value that emphasizes harmony, preservation of face, and acceptance of the status quo.

Having said that, Generation X also has high respect for competency and loyalty to teams. Thus, transparency and competency or performance-based reward at the workplace are of great importance to them. Gone were the days where seniority takes precedence. Loyalty to teams can be seen when they leave the organizations in groups.

Goal

When it comes to goals, Generation X seeks independence. Both Generation X and Y also seek meaningful work while Baby Boomers just want to lead a simple life. The younger generations want to know the significance of their tasks to the organization.

Leadership Style

As for leadership styles, interviewees were asked to describe their supervisor's leadership style and their leadership style if they were to hold a supervisory role. It is found that there are differences when it comes to leadership styles across generations. In general, the Boomer leadership style is firm while both Generation X and Y prefer teamwork. Nevertheless, teamwork between the two generations is different. Generation X's teamwork refers to participation from team members whereas Generation Y teamwork is all about empowerment where team members are allowed to complete tasks in his or her creative ways. Nevertheless, the Baby Boomer's leadership style is perceived to be results-oriented while Generation X perceived style is through empowerment. These work values, expectations, behaviors, goals, and leadership styles for each generation are summarized in Table 1:

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Table 1. Work Values, Expectations, Behaviours, and Goal of Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y

	Work-Related	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y
Values	***Comparison to the West***			
	Deferred Characteristics			
	Loyal	x		
	Independent		x	
	Similar Characteristics			
	Results Driven		x	
	Flexible		x	
	Team Player			x
	Confident			x
	Malaysia			
	Similar across Generation			
	Dedication	x	x	x
	Additional Attributes			
	Independent	x		
	Diligent		x	
	Ambitious		x	
Expectations	***Comparison to the West***			
	Deferred Characteristics/Crossover			
	Security	x	x	x
	Similar Characteristics			
	Opportunity to Learn		x	Unique to Malaysia: Spillover Attributes
	Challenging Work		x	
	Work-Life Balance		x	
	Malaysia			
	Additional Attributes			
	Fair Rewards		x	x

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Work-Related		Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y
Behaviors	***Comparison to the West***			
	Similar Characteristics			
	Results-focused		x	
	Multitasking		Unique to Malaysia	x
	Malaysia			
	Similar across Generation			
	Respect Authority	x	x	x
	Additional Attributes			
	Respect Competency		x	
	Loyal to team		x	
Goal	***Comparison to the West***			
	Similar Characteristics			
	Independence		x	
	Meaningful Work		Unique to Malaysia	x
	Malaysia			
	Additional Attributes			
	Lead a Simple Life	x		
Leadership Style				
	Actual Style	Firm	Teamwork: Participation	Teamwork: Empowerment
	Perceived Style	Results-Oriented	Empowerment	-

Conclusion

Managerial Relevance

Because of the multigenerational nature of the workforce, the employer certainly needs to consider the unique characteristics of these three generations. As mentioned by Bhattacharya and Wright (2005), managing human capital is important to brave through uncertainties. Hence, in this research, managing human capital is being taken further by looking into each generation. For example, employers should leverage on the additional work values of Generation X in Malaysia-diligent and ambitious, by showing them the career path in the organization. Besides, employers should also ask them what they expect from the organization and timeline to achieve that goal. Once this is clearly understood, the organization would be able to bring out the best in them.

When it comes to dedication, employers need to understand the definition across generations. Boomers may consider dedication as putting in lots of effort in achieving a task, while the younger generations may consider dedication as completing a

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task with the use of technology. Hence, having a clear performance indicator would be helpful for all.

In line with the clear performance indicator, it is time for Malaysian organizations to accelerate the culture of balance in the workplace as both younger generations expect employers to provide work-life balance. Organizations that encourage work-life balance have become very attractive to employees and at the same time able to draw a pool of candidates for its new openings. For example, having work-life balance can mean having exercise access, flexible hours, quiet space and short breaks.

Based on the findings, leaders must now realize that they are leading a learning workforce. As can be seen, both Generation X and Y in Malaysia place a lot of emphasis on transparency, which inevitably leads to fair rewards, and opportunities to learn. Thus, it is important for leaders to be transparent, not just during appraisal but providing feedback on day-to-day performance. Employees want to know how well they have been doing in their work and how evaluation is being carried out on their work. A simple pat on the back for a job well done is priceless and it goes a long way to the employees. If work is not as expected, the younger generations expect to be told immediately and not wait until the appraisal period. Organizations need to rethink the role of leadership. Employees need to view their supervisor as a problem solver.

Just like the western counterparts and as we move towards a learning organization, employers should leverage the experience of Baby Boomers by allowing them to feel valued by allowing them to mentor the younger generations. By doing so, the Boomers will be happy as they feel that the loyalty given by them is appreciated, a trait that they value. They will also feel well respected, and this would also give them a sense of security, which they desire.

To keep Generation X and Y going, leaders can also make use of their multitasking trait. They can also be given multiple tasks with clear objectives, deadlines and showing them how meaningful their work is, would meet their work expectations. This would not only help the organization to achieve its goals in a shorter time, but also drive them further.

When leadership styles are compared, there seems to be a mismatch between the generations. Baby Boomer, a firm leader and expects team members to complete tasks within a specific period. On the other hand, both Generation X and Y are team workers. For the Boomers, despite being results-oriented, leaders need to be aware that team members may view them as unapproachable, scary and even afraid to discuss with them despite the knowledge that Boomers have. Employers can help to reduce the unnecessary friction by acknowledging the rich experience that they have by encouraging knowledge sharing within the organization, transforming it into a learning organization where the younger generations look forward to. When this is achieved, it not only unleashes the potential competitive advantages through

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knowledge, it also reduces the fear between the Boomers and the younger generations. Both Generation X and Y leadership styles can be viewed as more of a peer than being autocratic. Generation X likes getting input/feedback from members. On the contrary, Generation Y's teamwork is more on providing the freedom to team members to complete their tasks.

Other measures, such as having a retirement plan, would attract the Boomers. Employers may engage a third party to manage the fund, which can be continued even after they leave the organization. This would provide some form of security, which may even attract the younger generations as they do not stay long in the organization.

In brief, working with a multigenerational workforce means constant two-way communication between the supervisor and the employee. Should there be any doubt; either party needs to speak up or most of the time, a direct question often solves the misunderstanding. Good supervision seems important to both Generation X and Y as both expect to be given the opportunity to learn, challenging work, work-life balance, and fair rewards. Supervisors need to be aware that besides task management, they need to fulfill people management as well. The supervisor can only provide the opportunity to learn to the employees when he or she understands what is required. It is common to say that everyone should be given the opportunities to learn when it comes to education. When it comes to working, the same should apply. In this aspect, the supervisor needs to be made responsible and aware of the opportunities to learn throughout the employee's career in the organization. Development needs should be jointly discussed with their subordinates. Hence, having milestones and skills enhancement chart that links to their career progression chart would be an attraction them. Though each generation is unique, leaders must not be judgmental, they must respect the values of each generation, provide support, and guidance.

Limitation

Although the research has met the objectives, limitations are still unavoidable. Klang Valley is the administrative, financial and services center of Malaysia, where businesses, local and foreign, big and small, are located. Though the urban population in Malaysia was last reported at 72.20 % in 2010, according to CIA World Factbook (2013), people in the urban areas may react differently compared to those in rural areas. Due to this disparity, care needs to be taken if applied to rural areas. Future research could focus on additional attributes to examine if it is due to different cultural contexts. Besides, it could also include examining the weight of crossover attributes for each generation where a certain generation may portray the characteristics more. In addition, the empirical investigation could allow a more in-depth comparison of what appeals to different generations and to look into the different levels of characteristics that similar across generations.

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Acknowledgment

This research was partially funded by the University of Malaya Research Grant (UMRG) under the Social and Behavioral Sciences (SBS) Research Cluster and University of Malaya BKP project.

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