

Generational differences: An examination of work values and generational gaps in the hospitality workforce

Dogan Gursoy^{a,*}, Thomas A. Maier^{b,1}, Christina G. Chi^c

^aWashington State University, School of Hospitality Business Management, 479 Todd Hall, Room 470, P.O. Box 644742, Pullman, WA 99164-4742, USA

^bVice President Red Lion Hotels Corporation, 201 W. North River Dr., Suite 100, Spokane, WA 99201, USA

^cWashington State University, School of Hospitality Business Management, USA

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify generational differences and similarities among hospitality employees and managers in order to develop leadership strategies and management styles that can be utilized to increase employee morale and productivity while enhancing recruitment and retention rates of highly qualified workers. Data for this study were collected through a series of in-depth focus group discussions. Findings indicated significant generational differences in world views, attitudes toward authority and perspectives on work. Findings suggested the Baby Boomers respect authority and hierarchy, while the Generation X-ers (Gen X-ers) rebel against authority. Findings also suggested while Baby Boomers live to work, Gen X-ers work to live. The Baby Boomers are willing to wait their turn for promotions and rewards, and are very loyal. On the other hand, Gen X-ers expect immediate recognition through title, praise, promotion, and pay. They also want a life outside of work—they are not likely to sacrifice theirs for the company. The Millennial Generation believes in collective action, with optimism of the future, and trust in centralized authority. They like teamwork, showing a strong will to get things done with a great spirit.

© 2007 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Generational differences; Human resource management; Hospitality workforce; Work values

1. Introduction

For the first time in the history of the modern workforce, employees from so many different generations are working side by side and closely both with people who are as young as their children and as old as their parents (Zemke et al., 2000). Managers are realizing that age has just as much to do with employees' hopes, learning styles and expectations as do culture, gender and other characteristics. By understanding each generation and by giving employees what they need to thrive, leaders can do more to increase productivity, morale and employee retention (Kogan, 2007). Merit is overcoming longevity in the deciding factors that contribute to promotion. People from very

distinct generations are competing for leadership positions in the workplace (Raines, 1997). Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennial Generation employees compete for the same jobs and often younger generations get them. Sometimes, because of the post-industrial info-centered work world, the person in charge may be younger than those he or she manages. As Generation X and Millennial Generation workers bring skills that some Baby Boomers may not possess, they end up finding themselves supervising older employees (Kogan, 2007).

In the past, multiple generations had worked in the same organization, but they were usually separated from each other by virtue of their job descriptions and system hierarchy. Middle-aged employees tended to be in middle management, and younger workers were everywhere else. Their contacts were mostly with their peers or one level up, with their supervisor (Kogan, 2007). Generational mixing was rare, or significantly structured by formality and protocol. When veteran employees made decisions, they

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 509 335 7945; fax: +1 509 335 3857.

E-mail addresses: dgursoy@cbe.wsu.edu (D. Gursoy), m.maier@redlion.com (T.A. Maier), cgengqi@wsu.edu (C.G. Chi).

¹Tel.: +1 509 459 6100; fax: +1 509 325 7324.

were handed down and communicated to the younger workers through the line supervisor. There was no sharing of how decisions were made, the strategy behind the order, or for that matter, any requests for input or feedback (Martin and Tulgan, 2002).

The management style was based on a top-down bureaucratic approach (Hogan et al., 1994). The top-down management and leadership practices were largely influenced by the feudalism paradigm (Barker, 1997), which describes leaders at the top of the hierarchy where they direct and control all activities of the people working below for them. Studies suggest that this type of leadership mainly originated from a bureaucratic framework, which is more appropriate for the Industrial Age (Gronn, 2002). The most important element of the bureaucratic framework is the traditional assumption that control must be rationalized. As a result, the bureaucratic management and leadership style were developed around the idea that goals are rationally conceived and, therefore, managerial practices should be structured to achieve those goals (Barnard, 1938; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). In this approach, organizational success or failure can be explained by actual managers' attributes (Ogaard et al., 2007). This model centers on issues such as motivating workers toward task objectives (House and Mitchell, 1974), leading them to produce efficiently and effectively (Zaccaro and Klimoski, 2001) and inspiring them to align with and commit to organizational goals (Bass, 1985; Zaccaro and Klimoski, 2001).

In the past, many hospitality companies utilized the principles of top-down bureaucratic management and leadership framework which resulted in cost-driven human resource policies where employees are treated as another resource to be deployed to achieve organizational goals (Lucas and Deery, 2004). It is true that, like other resources, human resources should be utilized as effectively and as efficiently as possible to reach organizational goals; but management has to remember that employees should be treated as human with feelings, aspirations, personal goals and priorities in life, the need for self-fulfillment and satisfaction, and the potential for development (Lucas and Deery, 2004; Ross, 1994; Ogaard et al., 2007). Studies suggest that large parts of the hospitality industry use traditional management and leadership styles (Mok et al., 1998; Pittaway et al., 1998; Tracey and Hinkin, 1994, 1996). While managers in some of the hotels located in the US appreciate the value of participative leadership, they are inclined to utilize a more authoritative style due to difficulties associated with the participative leadership style (Worsfold, 1989).

However, in recent years, significant changes have taken place in the workplace. Major hospitality companies such as Marriott, Hilton, Hyatt, Ritz Carlton, etc. are slowly recognizing that human capital and resources are significantly different than other resources a company has. They are realizing that resource-based and value-added policies are essential to achieve the delivery of high service quality

and customer care. That is why they are developing programs and policies to create a work environment that enables employees to have a satisfactory experience at work, good relationships with their superiors and peers, and a fair reward for the effort they have contributed (Ogaard et al., 2007).

While hospitality companies are slowly changing their management practices, labor force demographics are also changing. These changes and employees from several different generations working together are having both positive and negative impacts on employee retention, morale and company profitability (Gordon and Steele, 2005). One of the most important and unique benefits of generational blending is creativity. People who come together from different perspectives always have the potential to bring different thoughts and ideas to problem solving. The potential for positive creative synergy is immense. However, the generational blending and integration is also creating intergenerational problems in the workplace due to generational differences in values, worldviews, ways of working, ways of talking, thinking, even dressing in the workplace (Raines, 2003).

These generational differences are likely to create further conflicts in the workplace by dividing the workforce into an "us vs. them" mentality (Leadership Advantage, n.d.; Yang and Guy, 2006). In a workplace that requires collaboration and cooperation among workers from different generations to deliver the best possible service to customers, generational conflict among workers, combined with a top-down bureaucratic management approach, is likely to adversely influence service delivery. Thus, the interdependent nature of the hospitality industry cannot succeed with the underlying tension of intergenerational conflict in the workplace. The need for understanding differences and overcoming them is crucial in creating positive and fruitful working conditions that are likely to enable hospitality industry leaders to attract and retain workers that will ensure and improve the quality of service delivery and productivity (Ross and Boles, 1994).

Most studies suggest that even though the hospitality industry is slowly changing its management practices, they could do better (Lucas, 2002, 2004; Lucas and Deery, 2004; McGunnigle and Jameson, 2000; Price, 1994; Worsfold, 1999). Studies also suggest that there is significant difference between managers' and employees' perceptions of their work environment. Ogaard et al. (2007) suggest that managers are more likely to perceive the work environment as participative compared to employees. This difference in perceptions is just one of the many that affect organizational effectiveness.

Development of effective and efficient workplace strategies and management practices requires a thorough understanding of workforce needs and wants. To manage a very diverse workforce, hospitality leaders must try to understand the mindsets of different generations, and how each group sees the world based on its experiences (Zemke et al., 2000). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to

examine similarities and differences in the goals, expectations, worldviews, work philosophies and values of each generation of hospitality employees and managers.

2. Review of the literature

2.1. Generations and work values

One of the factors that is likely to significantly influence employee's job satisfaction and their commitment to work is their work values. That is why it is not surprising that interest in the examination of values has received considerable attention for many decades due to its importance in determining employee behaviors (Chu, 2007; Kim et al., 2007; White, 2006). Chu (2007) argues that understanding employees' values is of vital importance because the degree to which employees value their job influences their attitudes towards work. White (2006) suggests that values have cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions that are closely linked to motivation and satisfaction. Several studies reported that values are likely to have significant influence over a variety of attitudes and behaviors (Brown, 2002; Chu, 2007). Work values have also been related to hospitality job burnout (Kim et al., 2007), organizational commitment (Elizur and Koslowsky, 2001; Ogaard et al., 2007; Ross and Boles, 1994) and showing initiative in one's work (Pizam et al., 1980).

Most of the research on work values have been centered around three main areas: definition of the components of the work value domain and testing of the structure of that domain (Bolton, 1980; Hendrix and Super, 1968; Neumann and Neumann, 1983); the examination of the relationship between work values and other personal, social and organizational variables (Judge and Bretz, 1992; Ladkin, 1999; Lee et al., 2000; Meglino et al., 1989); and the impact of culture on work values (Chu, 2007; Elizur et al., 1991; Mok et al., 1998; Pizam, 1993; White, 2006). Since employees from the same generation are likely to share similar norms, it is likely that their work value and their attitudes toward work are likely to be influenced by the generation they belong to, which suggests that changes are likely to occur in the structure of work value domain from generation to generation.

2.2. Generational categories

Researchers and social scientists, who study the effects of population on society, use the term "generation" to refer to people born in the same general time span who share key historical or social life experiences (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002). The effects of those key life experiences tend to be relatively stable over the course of their lives (Smola and Sutton, 2002). Due to these distinct key life experiences, each generation develops a unique personality that determines its feelings toward authority and organization (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002). For example, members of generations who

come of age in lean times or war years tend to think and act differently than those born and raised in peace and abundance. The generational personality is also likely to determine what individuals want from work, what kind of workplace environment they desire and how they plan to satisfy those wants and desires. Due to generational differences, these wants and desires tend to vary from generation to generation. Therefore, people from different generations may have problems understanding others' perspectives of the work, which can be stressful, confusing, and frustrating in a demanding workplace like the hospitality industry (Zvikaite-Rotting, 2007).

Several researchers have labeled the generations of the 20th century (e.g., Smola and Sutton, 2002). Even though classifications of generations and the time span used have been inconsistent, behavioral sociologists suggest that each generation lasts approximately two decades, after which it fades into the background as the next generation comes into its own (Schaeffer, 2000; Shepard, 2004).

This study mainly focuses on generations who were born after the Second World War due to the fact that those generational groups are prevalent in today's workforce. Baby Boomers (Boomers), Generation X (Gen X-ers) and the Millennial Generation are the generations examined in this study. Even though there is a general consensus about the naming of the first two generations, there is little agreement on the label of the latter. While US census calls them the Millennial, others call them the Generation Y-ers or the Next Generation (Jennings, 2000). This study will use the term the Millennials. There is also little agreement on the years encompassing each generation (please see Smola and Sutton, 2002 for a detailed discussion).

Baby Boomers (1943–60): These people were born during or after World War II and raised in an era of extreme optimism, opportunity and progress. Boomers, for the most part, grew up in two-parent households, safe schools, job security and post-war prosperity. They represent about two-thirds of all US workers.

Generation X (1961–80): They were born after the Boomers into a rapidly changing social climate and economic recession. They grew up in two-career families with rising divorce rates, downsizing, the dawning of the high-tech age and the information age.

Millennials (1981–2000): They were born of Boomer parents and early X-ers into the current high-tech, neo-optimistic times. Although the youngest workers, they represent the most technologically adept. They are fast learners and tend to be impatient (Zemke et al., 2000).

3. Methods

In order to examine generational similarities and differences among hospitality employees and managers, a series of focus group discussions were conducted on employees of a North American branded hotel chain with over 50 hotels owner operated, franchised and leased. The hotel company is positioned as a mid- to upper-scale brand

with full service hotels, restaurants and convention services.

Demographic data for the workers employed in two geographical regions were obtained from the hotel company. The company's employee data suggested that three generations of employees (Baby Boomer, Generation X and Millennials) and two generations of managers (Baby Boomer and Generation X) were employed by the company in those two regions. Fifteen participants from each generation of employees and managers were randomly selected from each region. An invitation letter was sent to each selected employee and manager. The company agreed to compensate employees for taking part in the focus group discussions. As presented in Table 1, a total of 91 employees out of 150 participated in the focus group discussions resulting in a response rate of 60.7 percent.

A total of 10 focus group discussions were conducted in two locations five in Spokane, WA and five in Tri-Cities, WA. In order to minimize response bias, focus group discussions with managers and employees were conducted separately. In each location, a separate focus group discussion was conducted for each generation of employees and of managers. Focus group discussions were facilitated by a faculty member from a 4-year hospitality program. A standardized script was used during each focus group discussion session. At the beginning of each focus group discussion, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and they were assured about the confidentiality of the focus group discussions. Eight standardized questions relating to work environment, management and leadership issues in workplace, feelings toward younger and older managers' and coworkers' style, and participants' feelings about their job were asked. Each focus group discussion lasted about 2 hours, and all focus group discussions were recorded using two tape recorders. Each set of tape recordings was transcribed by a separate research assistant. Transcripts from both research assistants were compared by researchers to make sure that there were no mistakes and discrepancies.

Transcripts from each generational group for both managers and employees were examined by researchers to

group responses into meaningful units. First, responses to each open ended question from each location for the same generational group of employees or of managers were grouped. From there, researchers analyzed responses by looking for key words, phrases and themes. This process resulted in identification of clusters of key words, phrases and themes that revolves around the issues that are important to each group. Finally, significant issues for each generation were identified.

4. Results

In-depth focus group discussions revealed the characteristics that define each generation and differences among those generations (Table 2). Perhaps the biggest differences in the world views of these generations were their differing attitudes toward authority and the perceived importance of work in their lives. In the workplace, the differing attitudes toward authority showed up in either accepting or questioning, or even rebelling, against traditional viewpoints and orders handed down from above. The perceived importance of work in their lives influenced how seriously they take the work and how much time they are willing to spend in the workplace.

4.1. Baby Boomer Generation

As presented in Table 2, Boomers live to work, and they respect authority and hierarchy in the work place. This might be explained by the fact that the Boomers have traditionally been brought up in a work environment that respected authority and hierarchy. As suggested by one of the Boomers during the focus group discussions, "It is honorable [for us] to work through the ranks." Findings indicated that the Boomers are willing to wait their turn for promotions and rewards. They are also very loyal. Seniority is more important than merit for them. They expect their loyalty to the company to be rewarded through

Table 1
Number of participants who took part in each of focus group discussions

Region 1		Region 2	
Generation	Number of participants	Generation	Number of participants
<i>Managers:</i>		<i>Managers:</i>	
Baby Boomers	8	Baby Boomers	5
Generation X	13	Generation X	7
<i>Employees:</i>		<i>Employees:</i>	
Baby Boomers	12	Baby Boomers	11
Generation X	10	Generation X	8
Millennials	8	Millennials	9
Total	51		40

Table 2
Characteristics of each generation

Characteristics of the Baby Boomers Generation

- Live to work
- Respect authority and hierarchy in the work place
- Live large and are in charge

Characteristics of the Generation X

- Respond to instant gratification
- Work to live
- Identify with the lone ranger
- Friends in high places

Characteristics of the Millennials Generation

- The more the merrier
- Rules are made to be broken
- Here today and gone tomorrow
- Show me the way

promotions based on seniority. However, because of a rapidly shifting work force and corporate restructuring, many Boomers have changed jobs much more frequently than they hoped. That is why job security is crucial for them. Basically, they are very loyal to the company, and they expect the company to be loyal to them.

Findings also indicated that Boomers like being in charge. They like being the star of the show and getting credit for everything perceived as positive in the workplace. They tend to have big vision for their departments and for the company. They are willing to share vision with everyone as long as they get the recognition. They are willing to support proposals and ideas that are in line with their vision. They tend to be very positive, sometimes to the point of overconfidence and exuberance. They like important, seemingly risky projects. However, when a risky project falters, they are likely to look for someone else to blame for the failure.

They are tough to teach new tricks. They are happy to abide by the rules and very resistant to change because they tend to be comfortable with the way they have always done things. They tend to be very detail oriented and prefer hands-on experiences. However, they are not good at multitasking. They have never developed multitasking skills because they did not need them growing up. They tend to view younger staffers as scattered and inattentive to detail.

Technology is a big issue for them. They are not technologically (tech) savvy. They do not like computers. As some of them suggested, “My computer is out to get me.” Another one indicated that “It is a personal daily war with my computer.” If they are asked to perform something different or new, they require very detailed specific directions.

They enjoy and want personal gratification. Motivational messages such as: “You’re important to our success”, “Your contribution is unique and important to us” or “We need you” are likely to go a long way with them.

4.2. *Generation X*

As presented in [Table 2](#), the Gen X-ers respond to instant gratification, tend to work to live, identify with “The Lone Ranger” and like to have friends in high places. Unlike the Boomer generation, X-ers tend to be very impatient. Seniority is not important for them. They are not willing to wait their turn for promotion and raises. Whenever they do a good job, they expect the company to reward and recognize them. They expect immediate recognition through title, praise, promotions and pay. If there is a problem, they want to solve the problem immediately. Even if all the problems are solved immediately, it is hard to make them happy. They tend to complain about everything. The best work environment for them is the one that is fun, keeps them busy, but not too busy, so that they can do fun things while working. They

also want everyone, including their supervisors and managers, to be direct with them.

They work to live. Their job provides the means to enjoy their life. Their life outside of work is very important for them. They are not likely to sacrifice their life for the company. They want to work as many hours as they have to, not a minute longer because they want to go home and play. They learned from their parents’ experiences that going by the company rules is not likely to guarantee their job. Their philosophy is “Leave work at work.” They try very hard to strike a good balance in their lives. For that reason, professions requiring overtime or varied shifts do not match up well with their desire to work steady shifts, avoid long hours, and keep work and personal lives separate. In addition, they have very low tolerance for bureaucracy and rules, especially regarding time and attendance.

They tend to prefer companies that offer flexible schedules, independence, professional growth, mentors, interesting work and time off. They expect more from the company they work for such as free workout facilities, free childcare facilities, and free meals.

Findings also indicated that they are “The Lone Ranger.” They are very self-reliant, and often choose to be seen as self-sufficient. They work better in isolation. They are not into teams or meetings. They sometimes lack interpersonal skills. However, they are very tech savvy, and they have great respect for technology. The best work environment for them is one that provides the latest technology, and leaves them alone to do their work, because they like to be in charge of their own actions. Since they are good at multi-tasking, they like to work on simultaneous projects as long as the company lets them prioritize the projects.

They tend to distrust big institutions and assume that every job is temporary, every job is a stepping stone. They are not very loyal to any particular company. They are very skeptical, self-focused and self-protective at work ([Adams, 2000](#)). However, they expect opportunities for learning on the job so they can get promotions they desire or find a better job somewhere else. They have little patience or respect for the ignorant or those unwilling to learn.

X-ers tend to like having friends in high places so that they can participate in developing goals and even in strategic planning because they believe they are very smart. They like communicating directly with the upper management. However, this does not mean that they are not cynical about the management and the profit-driven attitudes of the Boomers. They have no problem questioning authority. They both expect and demand change. If they do not get what they want, they have no problem looking for a new job.

4.3. *Millennial Generation*

Unlike the X-ers, the Millennials tend to believe “the more the merrier.” They believe in collective action, are

optimistic about the future, and trust centralized authority. Although they have not been in the workplace for long, they are already showing a strong will to get things done with great spirit. They are great collaborators and favor teamwork. This might be due to having functioned in groups in school, organized sports and extracurricular activities from a very young age; but they are also very independent, self-confident and self-expressive. They like to be recognized and respected because they believe that they put so much of themselves into their work. They expect their supervisors and managers to, at least, know their names and acknowledge their good work. This generation believes managers should try to get to know everyone and give personal attention to each employee.

Even though the Millennials believe in collective action, they have a tendency to question every rule because they believe rules are made to be broken. They simply reject the notion that they have to stay within the rigid confines of a job description. They are likely to challenge workplace norms such as dress codes, inflexibility of the standard workday and employee–supervisor relations.

Since they are the first generation to grow up with the Internet, they take electronic collaboration for granted. Like X-ers, they like working with the latest technology. Having grown up in the video age, wielding a remote control and clicking a mouse, they assimilate information quickly and can focus on many things at once. They are even better at multitasking than the X-ers.

Like the X-ers, the Millennials are also not very loyal. They tend to be “here today and gone tomorrow.” They are likely to keep their career options open. However, as opposed to Gen X-ers who change jobs, Millennials are more likely to make entire career changes or to build parallel careers. They may work in the hospitality industry while taking classes to prepare themselves for another career. One reason for this might be that they are not followers by nature; if they are not happy, they are likely to be “out of there.” Since they are still young, they do not have the responsibilities of X-ers, such as mortgage payments, child-rearing responsibilities, etc. Their biggest expense tends to be their rent and their car payments. That is why they work to make their car payments and rent.

Like X-ers, they prefer flexible schedules. Work is not a priority for them. Their priorities are friends and family. However, this does not mean that they do not take their job and professional development very seriously. They are hard and ambitious workers; but unlike the Baby Boomers, they are not workaholics.

The biggest problem Millennials are having in the workplace is that they believe that no one respects and appreciates them because they are young. During the focus group discussions, one of the Millennials suggested that “employees will work harder if they know their hard work is being recognized.” Millennials tend to believe that they do not get the treatment they deserve from many of the older co-workers and managers. That makes them upset.

Findings suggested that the Millennials are in search of role models. They value professional development and seek mentors to show them the ropes. They are eager to learn and enjoy questioning things. They are very confident and have high self-esteem. They are motivated by similar incentives like previous generations, but seek more direction. They tend to work best when there is personal contact, strong leadership, and direction.

4.4. Perception of other generations

This study also attempted to identify how each generation perceives the other generations. Table 3 presents the perceptions Boomers have of other generations. As presented in Table 3, managers from Boomers have a very low opinion of Generation X and Millennials. Managers from Boomers Generation think that younger employees have no work ethic and they are “slackers.” The Boomers believe that even though younger employees still have a lot to learn and do not really take ownership, they are after recognition and promotions. The Boomers’ despise this attitude. In addition, findings also suggest that the Boomers employees do not have very high opinions of their Gen X managers. The Boomers employees think that their Gen X managers do not have the experience to manage and X-ers do not respect Boomers’ life experiences. Boomers also indicated that X-ers lack people skills and rely on technology too much.

Table 4 presents the X-ers’ perceptions of employees from the Millennials Generation and the X-ers’ perceptions of employees and managers from the Boomers Generation.

Table 3
Perceptions of the Baby Boomers of other generations

Perceptions of Managers from the Boomers Generation of the X-ers and Millennials:

- They have no work ethic
- They are just slackers
- He has been here 6 months and he wants a promotion
- They are not very reliable
- They are not consistent
- They do not know how to dress for work
- They keep saying, “It is not my job”
- They see this job as a stepping stone to a better job
- They do not know how to dress up
- They have way too many piercing and tattoos

Perceptions of the Boomer employees of their Generation X managers:

- They are whipper-snapper babies
- They do not have the experience. They need to gain a lot of experience
- They do not know how to manage
- They do not respect life experiences
- They work too hard to try to prove themselves
- They lack people skills
- They do not know how hard employees work. Company should develop a program where managers walk in employees’ shoes
- They rely on technology too much
- Everything is in E-mail
- They are not consistent

Table 4
Perceptions of the Generation X of other generations

Perceptions of the Generation X of employees from the Millennial Generation:

- They have no sense of urgency
- They lack ownership—"not my job"
- You have to teach them a lot more—iron uniform, good customer service, do more than the minimum
- They seem to lack common sense/might be book smart
- They are quick learners
- They are in search of role models. They look to managers/supervisors for knowledge
- They are overconfident
- They want constant praise/acknowledgement
- They want to be thanked for doing what they are supposed to be doing
- They are very high maintenance
- They do not understand that this is a business driven by guests

Perceptions of the Generation X of employees from the Baby Boomer Generation:

- It is hard to gain their respect
- They are set in their ways. They do not like change
- Dealing with them and convincing them to do something requires extra time and effort
- They have very good work ethics
- They are slow. They learn at a slower rate
- Technology is very challenging for them
- They like caring for people, they are good with customers
- They are very customer oriented
- They are very responsible

Perceptions of the Generation X of their managers from the Baby Boomer Generation:

- They are too financially driven
- They cut too many corners in order to reach financial goals to get their bonuses
- They are very loyal to the company
- They fear change
- They are not very appreciative of their subordinates
- They manage from their offices. They need to get out of the office and lead by example
- They are not part of the team. They fail to step in and help out when needed. They are basically administrators
- They do nothing to get to know employees
- They are not up to date

As presented in Table 4, like the Boomer managers the X-ers do not think very highly of Millennial employees. The X-ers think Millennials do not understand the nature of the hospitality business and they are slackers, but the X-ers admit that Millennials are very quick learners. However, findings suggested that the X-ers have very high opinions of employees from the Baby Boomer Generation and the X-ers respect employees from the Baby Boomer Generation. The X-ers think the Boomers are very responsible and customer oriented. However, the X-ers believe that it is hard to gain the Boomer employees' respect. The X-ers also believe that the Boomer employees are slow learners and not very good with technology.

When it comes to the X-ers' perceptions of their Boomer managers, they stereotype the boomer managers as typical administrators, someone who manages from his or her

office. This might be the reason why the X-ers think their Boomer managers are not good team players. The X-ers also think that their Boomer managers are too financially driven and they cut too many corners in order to reach financial goals to get their bonuses. Basically, the X-ers see Boomer managers as being out of date who still think that the rules and principles worked in the last century are still likely to work because they fear change.

5. Discussion: strategies for bridging the generation gap

With looming retirements of Baby Boomers, it will be increasingly important for organizations to attract and retain quality employees. The hospitality industry is no exception. To do so, the hospitality industry will need to develop new standards of human resource management in order to successfully connect with a multi-generational workforce. It is possible that a top-down and bureaucratic management and leadership style may not be effective with younger generations of employees. Workplace policies and leadership approaches may need to become flexible in addressing issues related to inclusiveness, recognition and alignment of generational values of workers in order to create greater work–life balance (Deloitte, 2006). A key to bridging the generation gap is the ability of hospitality leaders to create a supportive work environment for an increasingly diverse population of workers.

Bridging the generation gap requires acknowledging that everyone is different. Everyone's unique experiences, backgrounds, culture, etc. are likely to influence their attitudes toward work. These differences may have positive or negative consequences for a company. Generational differences are likely to be a source of frustration for leaders if they see those differences as potential problem areas (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002). Hospitality leaders need to understand that everyone has something good to offer and they may bring something better to the table if they are given a chance. That is why if the leaders learn to appreciate those differences by focusing on positive attributes and take time to consider the strengths each co-worker brings to the workplace, they are likely to manage those differences effectively and create a positive work environment. This positive dialogue bonds the participants in movement forward, celebrating their past successes and unifying their vision of the future while rebuilding their daily activities to be more closely aligned with their mutually discovered possibilities (Mann, 2006).

A useful leadership tool capable of stimulating positive dialogue and bridging generational groupings might be Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry offers a new way of dealing with organizational development by nurturing positive employee-centered dialogue over deficit-based thinking and problem-solving processes. It benefits an organization by bridging diversity and facilitating the alignment of organizational goals (vision) and the human needs (social actors) within the system. This inquiry and dialogue process can promote the unification

of divergent generational interests of social actors within the organization (Cooperrider et al., 2003). Application of the principles of positive inquiry may lower the tensions caused by the divergent generational interests that can result in political infighting, formation of power alliances and increased turnover.

Studies suggest that increasing contact and building up a close relationship between members of opposite groups can result in decreased tension between group members, increased the liking for those members and generalize to more positive attitudes and evaluations of the group as a whole (Desforges et al., 1991; Emerson et al., 2002; Feld, 1982). In addition, knowing that an in-group member has a member of the other group as a friend reduces negative feelings towards that group and leads to more positive intergroup attitudes (Wright et al., 1997). Establishing cooperative interaction with members of other generations requires going out and interacting with people from different generations. Companies need to find ways or create events that will enable employees to interact with each other. Generational integration in the workplace is likely to be mutually beneficial for both the company and employees if it is handled accordingly. This is likely to make the workplace a fun environment for employees, and likely to result in increased productivity, better employee retention, and attraction of better workers.

However, the potential for conflict between the Baby Boomers and Generation X-ers has always been present in the workplace. Most of the time, the main cause of those conflicts has been the potential for misunderstanding due to generational differences (Smith, n.d.). Since the Baby Boomers and Generation X-ers comprise the majority of the work force for most companies, it is crucial to understand and develop strategies to minimize the conflicts between those generations. The Generation X-ers are slowly moving into managerial positions; and some of them are supervising the Baby Boomers, which is creating additional conflicts in the workplace. Companies should develop strategies that can be employed by the Baby Boomers and Generation X-ers to build better working relationships with each other (Stencel, 2001).

5.1. *Strategies for managing the Baby Boomers Generation*

Since gaining respect and recognition is crucial for the Boomers, companies can develop programs that will enable the Boomers to gain the respect they yearn for while helping and training others. Findings suggested the Boomers Generation complains that younger generations do not respect their life experiences, while younger generations indicated that they are in search of role models. These findings suggest that companies can lower workplace conflicts by offering mentor programs by matching the Boomers with employees from younger generations (Zaslow, 2006). This is likely to solve younger employees' complaints about not having role models and not getting enough training. The mentor programming is

also likely to help Boomers, because it will give them a chance to mentor younger generations by utilizing their life experiences. Mentor programming in the long term may further lower tensions among generations because it is likely to provide a platform and an opportunity for employees and managers from each generation to get to know each other better. While older generations can show younger generations the ropes, younger generations may be able to help them with technology issues. This may result in mutual respect and understanding among different generations, and therefore a better working environment for everyone (Dittman, 2005).

It is also important to understand that the Boomers like to be rewarded and acknowledged for their contributions. Therefore, companies should create opportunities for them to be rewarded, recognized and respected. One way of recognizing and rewarding them might be through asking them to handle the company presentation at an industry trade show. Another example might be asking for their input on issues related to company strategy and/or getting their consensus on issues that seem to be important to them. These simple strategies will make them feel like they are really part of the company, which values their input and they are helping the company move forward. This is likely to result in higher employee loyalty and commitment to the company.

5.2. *Recommended strategies for Boomers Managers to manage younger employees*

When dealing with employees from younger generations, the Boomers should understand that, unlike themselves, younger generations work to live and they value a healthy work–life balance. Expecting the X-ers to work long hours and make too many sacrifices for the good of the company too often, will send the average Xer job hunting. Schedules that are flexible and balanced is likely to work best for Xers.

Boomers should understand that younger generations resent authority and they crave autonomy. One of the biggest mistakes a Boomer manager can make is to try to micromanage Xers and Millennials. One way of keeping younger generations happy, while motivating them to complete their work, might be to clearly communicate the objectives and provide autonomy and resources to get things done.

As stated earlier, younger generations are good at multitasking. To keep them motivated, the Boomer managers should give them several things to do at a time and let them take control of prioritizing. As long as younger generations are not micromanaged and given the autonomy, they are likely to get things done assuming that they were given adequate training. However, the Boomers should also remember that younger generations have a constant need for constructive feedback and praise. That is why Boomer managers should spend time assessing younger employees, give them frequent constructive feedback and praise.

Boomers should also remember that younger generations are very tech savvy and they like up-to-date technology. Retaining younger generations may rely heavily on how much a company invests in technology. They are likely to see investments in technology as an investment in themselves and in their work. In addition, they prefer communicating through emails. That is why the best way of corresponding with younger generations might be through email. As indicated earlier, the Boomers like to have face-to-face communications. However, they should save meetings for issues that require face-to-face communication, and use e-mail when the matter can be handled via a well-worded, concise written message.

5.3. *Recommended strategies for Generation X-ers to manage older employees*

More and more X-ers are moving into managerial positions where they frequently manage employees from older generations. It is crucial for companies to provide adequate training for the Gen X managers on how to deal with employees from older generations. Such training may lower tensions in the workplace by teaching younger managers critical supervisory skills. The training should also suggest techniques for handling multigenerational issues and problems. These training sessions should especially focus on how to show respect to the experiences of older employees. To make older employees feel more important and to gain their experiences, the Gen X managers should acknowledge that they have less experience and can learn from older employees. The Gen X managers should be encouraged to seek out more experienced employees, seeking their input and advice. This strategy will not only make older employees feel more valued, but it will also help the Gen X managers to improve their knowledge and skills. The Gen X managers should understand that older generations are not very tech savvy; and many Baby Boomers find e-mail or voice mail too impersonal, preferring instead to speak face to face.

Another important issue when dealing with older generations is the amount of attention they receive. When dealing with Boomers, the Gen X managers should give their full attention. Multi-tasking may help the Gen X managers accomplish a lot during the day. However, a Baby Boomer is likely to be annoyed if a Gen X manager is writing an e-mail while the two are talking. Giving full attention actually may be beneficial in the long run because it may give the impression to older employees that their younger managers are really interested in what they have to say. This may result in gaining the respect of older employees.

5.4. *Recommended strategies to manage Millennial Generation*

Even though the Generation X and Millennial Generation have some similarities, they are also significantly

different. The Millennials tend to “hang” with people from their own generation. They may look like kids on the corner, which may be seen as immaturity by some of the managers and supervisor (Armour, 2005). As indicated earlier, one of the complaints the Millennials have is that everyone sees them as the “kids.” Regardless of how they may seem when interacting with co-workers from their own generation, managers and supervisors should treat them with respect, embracing their fresh perspectives. To make Millennials feel important and part of the team, managers and supervisors should ask them their opinions. They love to collaborate and be team players. They tend to respond less enthusiastically to an autocratic manager. Millennials have no problem with managers challenging them. In fact, they like challenges because they like working on things that really matter. One of the best ways of motivating them might be offering more responsibility as a reward for their accomplishments (Tulgan, 2003).

The findings of this study suggested that Millennials are in search of role models, and they have great respect for experience and older generations, especially the Baby Boomers. Establishing a mentor–mentee relationship between these two groups may be beneficial to both generations and may enable companies to lower generational tensions in the workplace. Because Millennials desire to improve their skills and their knowledge, Boomers can easily mentor them by sharing what they know about the workplace and how to perform certain duties. These are likely to make the Millennials very loyal to the company while improving their perceptions of how much the company values them.

Leaders should also understand that some of the Millennial employees are likely to lack good interpersonal skills. They may need help and guidance improving their interpersonal skills. One way of dealing with this issue may be offering opportunities for them to socialize with other employees. To make them part of the team and help them improve their social skills, companies can organize outing events such as picnics, going to a sporting event or a dinner outing. These events are likely to help the Millennials to feel like they are part of a bigger family, which is likely to make them very loyal to the company.

6. Limitations

Like any other study, this study is not free from limitations. Data for this study were gathered through a series of focus group discussions from the employees of a single hotel chain located in one state. Even though 10 focus group discussions were conducted and employees from two geographical regions participated in the study, findings of this study cannot be generalized beyond those regions because of the nature of the study. In addition, the number of participants for each focus group was limited to a maximum of fifteen people in order to gain a thorough understanding of generational similarities and differences. Because of the design of the study, the conclusions are

necessarily based upon the input of a limited number of individuals. This further limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should be conducted on a larger sample of hospitality employees, preferably a national sample that includes several large chains.

7. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine generational differences and similarities among hospitality employees and managers in order to develop leadership strategies to increase employee morale and productivity. Using the data collected through a series of in-depth focus group discussions from employees of a US hotel chain, generational similarities and differences were identified. Findings suggested that the Boomers respect authority and hierarchy, while the Generation X-ers tend to rebel against authority. Findings also suggested while Boomers live to work, the X-ers work to live. The Boomers are willing to wait their turn for promotions and rewards, and they are very loyal. On the other hand, the Generation X-ers want immediate recognition through title, praise, promotion, and pay. They also want a life outside of work—they are not likely to sacrifice theirs for the company.

The Millennials believe in collective action, are optimistic, and trust centralized authority. They like teamwork, showing a strong will to get things done with great spirit. Further, each generation's perception of other generations was examined. Findings indicated that while the X-ers respect the Boomer employees, the Boomers do not have very high opinions of younger generations.

Clearly, the current study is just one step towards a thorough understanding of generational differences and similarities among hospitality employees and managers. Identification of generational issues is likely to result in development of leadership strategies that increase employee morale and productivity by lowering workplace tensions and generational conflicts in the workplace. Therefore, this study holds the potential for helping companies and managers to better understand generational issues in the workplace. In addition, the results of the study will, hopefully, serve as a base for more comprehensive research.

References

- Adams, S.J., 2000. Generation X: how understanding this population leads to better safety programs. *Professional Safety* 45, 26–29.
- Armour, S., 2005. Generation Y, they've arrived at work with a new attitude. *USA Today*. Retrieved March 15, 2007, from <http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2005-11-06-gen-y_x.htm>.
- Barker, R.A., 1997. How can we train leaders if we do not know what leadership is? *Human Relations* 50 (4), 343–362.
- Barnard, C.I., 1938. *The Functions of the Executive*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Bass, B.M., 1985. *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations*. Free Press, New York.
- Bolton, B., 1980. Second-order dimensions of the work values inventory. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 17, 33–40.
- Brown, D., 2002. The role of work and cultural values in occupational choice, satisfaction, and success: a theoretical statement. *Journal of Counseling and Development* 80, 48–55.
- Chu, K.H.A., 2007. A factorial validation of work value structure: second-order confirmatory factor analysis and its implications. *Tourism Management*.
- Cooperrider, D., Whitney, D., Starvos, J., 2003. *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook*. Lakeshore Communications, Bedford Heights, OH.
- Desforges, D.M., Lord, C.G., Ramsey, S.L., Mason, J.A., van Leeuwen, M.D., West, S.C., Lepper, M.R., 1991. Effects of structured cooperative contact on changing negative attitudes toward stigmatized social groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 60 (4), 531–544.
- Deloitte, 2006. *Hospitality 2010: a five-year wake up call*. Available from the Preston Robert Tisch Center for Hospitality, Tourism and Sports Management, New York University.
- Dittman, M., 2005. Generational differences at work. *Monitor on Psychology* 36 (6), 54–69.
- Elizur, D., Koslowsky, M., 2001. Values and organizational commitment. *International Journal of Manpower* 22 (7), 593–599.
- Elizur, D., Borg, I., Hunt, R., Beck, I.M., 1991. The structure of work values: a cross-cultural comparison. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 12, 21–38.
- Emerson, M.O., Kimbro, R.T., Yancey, G., 2002. Contact theory extended: the effects of prior racial contact on current social ties. *Social Science Quarterly* 83 (3), 745–761.
- Feld, S., 1982. Social structural determinants of similarity among associates. *American Sociological Review* 47, 797–801.
- Gordon, V.N., Steele, M.J., 2005. The advising workplace: generational differences and challenges. *NACADA Journal* 25 (1), 26–30.
- Gronn, P., 2002. Distributed leadership as a unit analysis. *The Leadership Quarterly* 13, 423–451.
- Hendrix, V., Super, D.E., 1968. Factor dimensions and reliability of the work values inventory. *Vocational Guidance Quarterly* 17, 269–274.
- Hogan, R., Curphy, G.J., Hogan, J., 1994. What we know about leadership—effectiveness and personality. *American Psychologist* 49 (6), 493–504.
- House, R.J., Mitchell, T., 1974. A path-goal theory of leader effectiveness. *Journal of Contemporary Business*, 81–97.
- Jennings, A.T., 2000. Hiring Generation X. *Journal of Accountancy* 189, 55–59.
- Judge, T.A., Bretz, R.D., 1992. Effects of work values on job choice decisions. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 77, 261–271.
- Kim, H.J., Shin, K.H., Umbreit, W.T., 2007. Hotel job burnout: the role of personality characteristics. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 26, 421–434.
- Kogan, M., 2007. *Human resources management: bridging the gap*. Retrieved March 7, 2007, from <<http://www.govexec.com/features/0901/0901s1.htm>>.
- Kupperschmidt, B.R., 2000. Multigeneration employees: strategies for effective management. *The Health Care Manager* 19, 65–76.
- Ladkin, A., 1999. Life and work history analysis: the value of this research method for hospitality and tourism. *Tourism Management* 20, 37–45.
- Lancaster, L.C., Stillman, D., 2002. *When Generations Collide*. HarperCollins, New York.
- Leadership Advantage, n.d. *Generations at Work: Boomers, GenXers & Nexters*. Retrieved March 13, 2007, from <<http://www.leadershipadvantage.com/generationsAtWork.shtml>>.
- Lee, F.K., Dougherty, T.W., Turban, D.B., 2000. The role of personality and work values in mentoring programs. *Review of Business* 21, 33–40.
- Lucas, R.E., 2002. Fragments of HRM in hospitality? Evidence from the Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) 1998. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 14 (5), 207–212.
- Lucas, R.E., 2004. *Employment Relations in the Hospitality and Tourism Industries*. Routledge, London.
- Lucas, R., Deery, M., 2004. Significant developments and emerging issues in human resource management. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 23 (5), 459–472.

- Mann, A., 2006. An appreciative inquiry model for building partnerships. Retrieved October 10, 2006, from <<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/gem/partnerships.html>>.
- Martin, C.A., Tulgan, B., 2002. *Managing Generation, the Generation Mix: from Urgency to Opportunity*, second ed. HRD Pressm, Amherst, MA.
- McGunnigle, P., Jameson, S., 2000. HRM in UK hotels a focus on commitment. *Employee Relations* 22 (4), 403–422.
- Meglino, B., Ravlin, E., Adkins, C., 1989. A work values approach to corporate culture: a field test of the value congruence process and its relationship to individual outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 74, 424–432.
- Mok, C., Pine, R., Pizam, A., 1998. Work values of Chinese hotel managers. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research* 21 (3), 1–16.
- Neumann, L., Neumann, U., 1983. A discriminant analysis of students' work values: differences between engineering and liberal arts. *Journal of Experimental Education* 52, 41–66.
- Ogaard, T., Marnburg, E., Larsen, S., 2007. Perceptions of organizational structure in the hospitality industry: consequences for commitment, job satisfaction and perceived performance. *Tourism Management*.
- Pittaway, L., Carmouche, R., Chell, E., 1998. The way forward: leadership research in the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 17 (4), 407–426.
- Pizam, A., 1993. Managing cross-cultural hospitality enterprises. In: Jones, P., Pizam, A. (Eds.), *The International Hospitality Industry: Organizational and Operational Issues*. Wiley, New York, NY, pp. 51–73.
- Pizam, A., Reichel, A., Neuman, Y., 1980. The motivational profile and work values of hospitality students. *The Journal of Hospitality Education* 4 (1).
- Price, L., 1994. Poor personnel practice in the hotel and catering industry: Does it matter? *Human Resource Management Journal* 4 (4), 44–62.
- Raines, C., 1997. *Generations at Work: Managing Generation X*. Retrieved March 7, 2007, from <<http://www.generationsatwork.com/articles/genx.htm>>.
- Raines, C., 2003. *Connecting Generations—the Sourcebook for a New Workplace*. Crisp Publications, Menlo Park, CA.
- Ross, G.F., 1994. Service quality ideals among hospitality industry employees. *Tourism Management* 15 (4), 273–281.
- Ross, L.E., Boles, J.S., 1994. Exploring the influence of workplace relationships on work-related attitudes and behaviors in the hospitality work environment. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 13 (2), 155–171.
- Schaeffer, J., 2000. *Kemper Reports (Winter-Spring)*. Kemper Distributors, Inc., Chicago, IL.
- Shepard, S., 2004. *Managing the Millennial*. Consultative Education in Global Telecommunications. Shepard Communication Group, LCC.
- Smith, G. P., n.d. *Baby Boomer Versus Generation X: Managing the New Workforce*. Retrieved March 15, 2007 from <<http://www.chartcourse.com/articlebabyvsngenx.html>>.
- Smola, K.W., Sutton, C.D., 2002. Generational differences: revisiting generational work values for the new millennium. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 23, 363–382.
- Stencel, B., 2001. Tips offered to close generation gap in the workplace. Retrieved March 15, 2007 from <<http://www.uwex.edu/news/2001/2/tips-offered-to-close-the-generation-gap-in-the-workplace>>.
- Tracey, J.B., Hinkin, T.R., 1994. Transformational leaders in the hospitality industry. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly* 35 (2), 18–24.
- Tracey, J.B., Hinkin, T.R., 1996. How transformational leaders lead in the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 15 (2), 165–176.
- Tulgan, B., 2003. *Managing Generation X: How to Bring out the Best in Young Talent*. Norton, New York.
- Uhl-Bien, M., Marion, R., McKelvey, B., 2007. Complexity leadership theory: shifting leadership from the industrial age to the knowledge era. *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, 298–318.
- White, C., 2006. Towards an understanding of the relationship between work values and cultural orientation. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 25, 699–715.
- Worsfold, P., 1989. Leadership and managerial effectiveness in the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 8 (2), 145–155.
- Worsfold, P., 1999. HRM, performance, commitment and service quality in the hotel industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 11 (7), 340–348.
- Wright, S.C., Aron, A., McLaughlin-Volpe, T., Ropp, S.A., 1997. The extended contact effect: knowledge of cross-group friendships and prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 73 (1), 73–90.
- Yang, S., Guy, M.E., 2006. Geners versus Boomers: work motivators and management implications. *Public Performance and Management Review* 29 (3), 267–284.
- Zaccaro, S.J., Klimoski, R.J., 2001. The nature of organizational leadership: an introduction. In: Zaccaro, S.J., Klimoski, R.J. (Eds.), *The Nature of Organizational Leadership*. Jossey Bass, San Francisco, pp. 3–41.
- Zaslow, J., 2006. Baby Boomer managers struggle with mentoring. *The Wall Street Journal Online*. Retrieved March 15, 2007, from <<http://www.careerjournal.com/columnists/movingon/20030606-movington.html>>.
- Zemke, R., Raines, C., Filipczak, B., 2000. *Generations at Work*. American Management Association, New York.
- Zvikaite-Rotting, O., 2007. Generation gap: resolving conflicts between generations. Retrieved March 13, 2007, from <<http://www.orienta-z-roetting.de/Generation%20Gap%20Artikle.pdf>>.