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EXPLORING THE MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE'S PERSONAL AND WORK VALUES: THE FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose. The purpose of the paper is to review the main contributors to the development of the topic of generational differences at workplaces and to explore emerging trends in the future research agenda.

Design/methodology/approach. The literature review, based on conceptual and relational content analyses, has been carried out to annotate and critique the literature on the topic of generational differences as a source of conflict or productivity. The paper develops three research questions and advances three hypotheses to prove or disprove for future research.

Findings. The paper provides scientific discussion and recommendations on literature sources that might be valuable for similar research on generational difference issues. The paper develops a theoretical framework for understanding the values of different generations and how they are formed and changed and provides a new conceptual model of future research.

Originality/value. The paper identifies four further streams of research on the correlation between personal and work values in the context of generational differences in the workplace; therefore, the paper can potentially contribute to the current scientific discussion on the multigenerational workforce's personal and work values.

Type of paper: Literature review

Keywords: generational differences; personal values; work values; multigenerational workforce.

INTRODUCTION: TOPICALITY, PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH METHODS

In recent years, studies on generational differences in the workplace have gained a lot of interest among organizations, practitioners and researchers, resulting in various scientific studies and popular literature addressed to the business environment (Lyons and Kuron, 2013; Saba, 2013). In today's turbulent business environment business leaders find themselves managing people from various generations and there is a need to adapt the workplace to the multigenerational workforce. This stems from the necessity of managing the multigenerational workforce, further adapting workplaces for the multigenerational workforce, attracting new talent and keeping hold of it, and determining conditions that would facilitate positive attitudes and behaviour among younger-generation employees (Saba, 2013). The difference in managing people from distinct generations is becoming especially pronounced due to different personal and work values. Understanding the ways the multigenerational workforce could collaborate in the workplace will contribute to more efficient attraction, retention, communication, involvement and management with regard to employees (Dencker, Joshi and Martocchio, 2008).

The purpose of the paper is to review the main contributors to the development of the topic of generational differences at workplaces and to explore emerging trends in the

research agenda and develop a new conceptual model for future research. What we want to know is how and to what extent a new conceptual research model of the multigenerational workforce's personal and work values can contribute in solving generational problems. Put simply, how do we bridge a generational difference and cooperate on the path to great performance? The topic is quite relevant as it has already been under investigation for a few decades, although the turbulent socio-economic and technological environment adds new dimensions to it.

The research method of the paper, based on literature *content analysis*, opens up a new hypothesis and new research questions for further investigation. *Content analysis* is an observational research method that is used to systemically evaluate the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communications (Kolbe and Burnett, 1991). It is usually associated with a positivist paradigm (Collis and Hussey, 2009), although it has been described as “the diagnostic tool of qualitative researchers, which they use when faced with a mass of open-ended material to make sense of ...” (Mostyn, 1985, p. 117). Even though content analysis suffers from a number of problems – for instance, Silverman argues that “its theoretical basis is unclear and its conclusion can often be trite” (1993, p.59) – the authors believe that “the method of content analysis enables the researcher to analyze a large amount of textual information and systematically identify its properties, such as the presence of certain ... concepts and themes” (Sekaran and Bougie, 2009, p. 386).

The paper is organized as follows. Firstly, it explores the importance of research on generational issues in the context of the Latvian labour market: the latest trends and forecasts. Then the paper identifies the challenges of previous research on the topic and current tendencies in generational issues by means of literature *content analysis*. The authors have carried out a *conceptual analysis* to establish the existence and frequency of the main core concepts in published research papers (n = 53) and then a *relational analysis* builds on the conceptual analysis by examining the relationships among concepts in published research papers. Finally, the paper develops a conceptual model of future research that leads to new research questions and new hypotheses. In the end, the paper discusses the findings and makes a conclusion.

Managing different generations in the 21st century: tendencies, opportunities and threats.

Managing different generations is particularly topical nowadays as a human resource management (HRM) issue due to three reasons. Firstly, distinct generations have different values and expectations in relation to work. Secondly, when compared to prior periods, people of different generations are working together for longer periods, which is linked to the implementation of lifelong learning policies, raising of the retirement age and reduction in pensions in case of early retirements, thus contributing to the involvement of older generations and even retired workers in the labour market. Thirdly, there are contradictions in companies' management practices, the reduction of stable and high-quality jobs (Saba, 2013). The tendency of older generations' involvement in the labour market will continue in the coming years (Adams and Rau, 2004; Hebert and Luong, 2008). The governments of member states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are already planning measures to promote active ageing (OECD, 2006; Saba and Guérin, 2005).

The topicality of the multigenerational workforce management issue for the Latvian labour market and thus for Latvian business management is also determined by demographic factors. As noted by the World Bank researchers Victoria Levin and Emily Sinnott, the significant imbalance in the generational structure of the Latvian population is not related to the demographic explosion after the Second World War, but rather has been caused by the sharply declining birth rate since the beginning of the 1990s and the emigration of the younger generations. By 2030 the proportion of the working age population, which is defined as people between 15 and 64, will drop by almost 7 percent, while the proportion of the 50+ working age population group will increase to 45.6 percent in 2030 as shown in Fig.1.

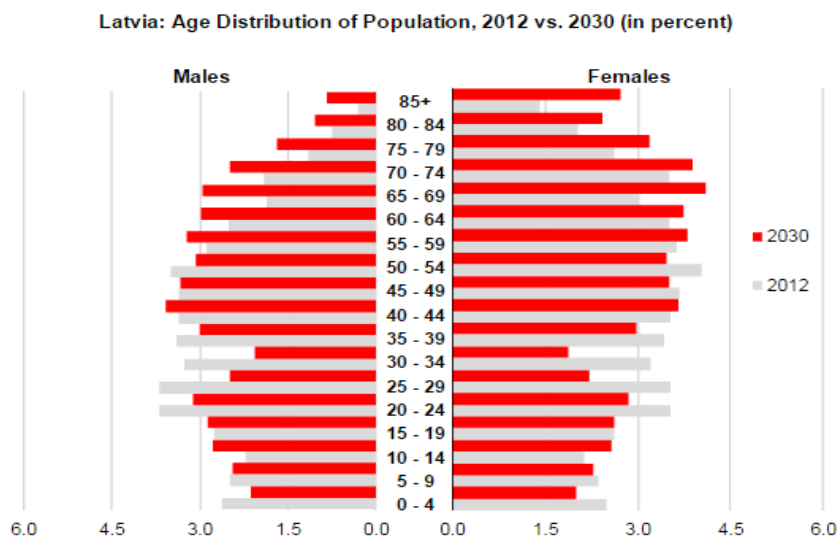


Figure 1. Latvia: Age distribution of population, 2012 vs. 2030 (in percent)

Source: “The active aging challenge for longer working lives in Latvia”, The World Bank, 2015.

What is more, per the World Bank’s forecasts, during the next 50-year period there will be an increase in the average age of the population in Latvia, and the economy will face difficulties when adapting to the differences in the distribution of various age groups and the decrease of younger age groups as shown in Fig. 2. Therefore, one of the recommendations by the World Bank for Latvia is to involve people over 64 in the future labour market (“The active aging challenge for longer working lives in Latvia”, The World Bank, 2015).

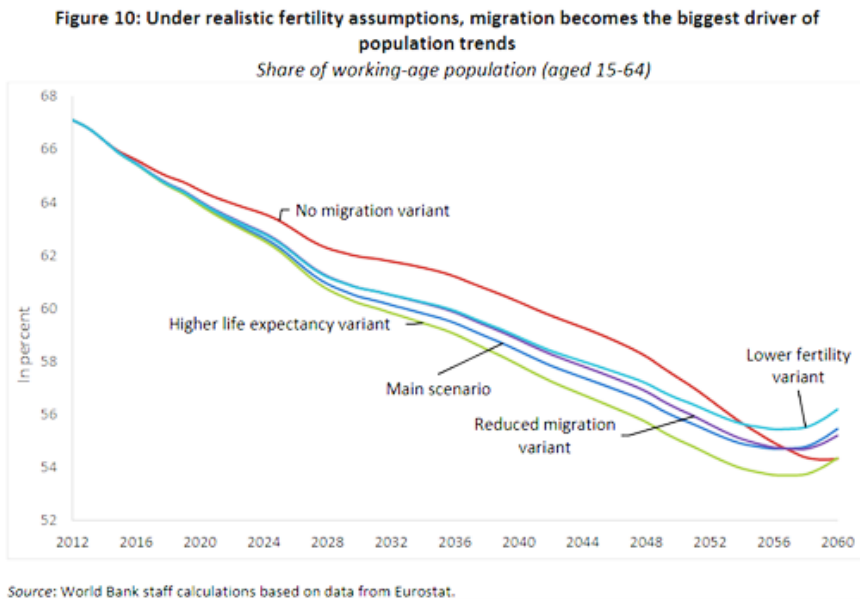


Figure 2. The active aging challenge for longer working lives in Latvia
 Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from Eurostat.

In the coming decades, three generations will constitute the basis of the Latvian labour market, the identification factors of which are described in the generational theory by Hove and Strauss: 1) the baby boomer generation (people who were born between 1943 and 1960), 2) Generation X (1961–1980), and 3) Generation Y (1982–2004), each having a distinct set of values that determines behaviour at work for the representatives of these generations (Howe and Strauss, 1991, 1993, 1997, 2007). What is more, several researchers have even identified six generations, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

The division of present generations according to the generational theory of Howe and Strauss

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Generation type</i>
GI Generation	1901-1924	Civic (hero)
Silent Generation	1925-1942	Adaptive (artist)
Boomer Generation	1943-1960	Idealist (prophet)
Thirteener (Xer) Generation	1961-1981	Reactive (nomad)
Millennial Generation	1982-2004	Civic (hero)
Homeland Generation	2005 - present	Adaptive (artist)

Source: Howe, Neil; Strauss, William (1991). *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*. New York: William Morrow and Company

Zemke, Raines, Filipczak (2000) characterize it as a challenge to modern businesses and declare that it is necessary to build “generationally friendly companies”. The differences in attitudes and behaviour at work of the representatives of distinct generations are pointed out: (Zemke, Raines, Filipczak, 2000).

Table 2

Attitude and behavioural traits of present generations in the workplace

	Veterans	Boomers	Xers	Nexters
Outlook	Practical	Optimistic	Skeptical	Hopeful
Work ethic	Dedicated	Driven	Balanced	Determined
View of authority	Respectful	Love/hate	Unimpressed	Polite
Leadership by	Hierarchy	Consensus	Competence	Pulling together
Relationships	Personal	Personal	Reluctant to	Inclusive
	sacrifice	gratification	commit	
Turnoffs	Vulgarity	Political	Cliché, hype	Promiscuity
		incorrectness		

Source: Zemke R., Raines C., Filipczak B., Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers and Nexters in Your Workplace. AMACOM, 2000

Such generational diversity provides a lot of opportunities for business management research regarding similarities and differences of generations in terms of their personal and work values and how to manage differences effectively. However, the paper identified many challenges in previous studies on generational issues.

Challenges in previous studies and current tendencies in generational difference issues.

Some researchers are critical of generational issue studies. It has been pointed out that to date, scientific research on generational differences regarding behaviour at work have a descriptive character and lack a clear theoretical framework (Joshi, Dencker, and Franz, 2011; Parry and Urwin, 2011). Saba (2013) somewhat categorically concludes that the phenomenon of generational differences is a myth, pointing out that there is no empirical basis for the assumption that employees’ work values and expectations regarding working conditions, their behaviour and attitudes, could be solely explained by the fact that they belong to a certain generation. However, Lyons and Kuron (2013) refer to considerable scientific evidence that, despite their relative similarity, different generations at work have distinct personal characteristics, work values and orientations, professional experience, requirements regarding leadership, teamwork and management behavioural models.

Studies of the last 20 years demonstrate a comprehensive and pronounced growth of individualism in all generations, which corresponds to the common social tendency towards “individualization” (Blok, 1998). Research also indicates growing extraversion (Twenge, 2001), idealism, honesty and self-esteem in younger-generation adults, but at the same time they exhibit increasing neuroticism (Twenge, 2000; Andre et al., 2010; Smits et al., 2011; Busch, Venkitachalam, and Richards, 2008; Scollon and Diener, 2006; Wong,

Gardiner, Lang, and Coulon, 2008) and narcissism (Twenge et al., 2008; Stewart and Bernhardt, 2010). The role of remuneration, recreation and leisure activities is increasing, while diligence at work and the general importance of work is declining (Lyons and Kuron, 2013). Research furthermore indicates that younger-generation employees have the lowest self-confidence (Stewart and Bernhardt, 2010), job satisfaction, and loyalty to an organization, are less supportive of teamwork, but have higher self-esteem (Gentile, Twenge, and Campbell, 2010; Twenge and Campbell, 2001), creativity (Kim, 2011), and professional mobility, and they support competition, independence and personality-oriented leadership (Twenge, 2006).

The future tendency in the labour market is employees with growing egocentrism, mobility and self-esteem, but increased anxiety and depression. (Twenge, 2006). Generational differences regarding work values (remuneration, occupational prestige, job satisfaction, opportunity to be independent, possibility to maintain a balance between work and private life, safety at work, comfort in the workplace, incentives and bonuses, etc.) were also proved by several recent years studies in various countries and fields: Lyons, Higgins and Duxbury (2010); Jin and Rounds (2012); Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, and Lance (2010); Wray-Lake et al. (2011); Krahn and Galambos (2014); Johnson (2001); Smola and Sutton (2002); Hansen and Leuty (2012); Bristow, Amyx, Castleberry and Cochran (2010); Gursoy, Chi and Karadag (2013); Real, Mitnick, and Maloney (2010); Taylor (2012); Wong et al. (2008); Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins (2005); Lyons et al. (2012a, 2012b); Lub, Bijvank, Bal, Blomme and Schalk (2012); Cennamo and Gardner (2008); Cogin (2012). What is more, researchers and practitioners are currently facing the confusion of evidence that is collected in different contexts and examines the generational phenomenon from various theoretical and methodological viewpoints (Lyons and Kuron, 2013).

After extensive analysis of recent studies on generational differences in the workplace, Lyons and Kuron (2013) recommend further research on generational differences at work following *a clear theoretical framework, using classical generational theories* (Mannheim, 1952; Howe and Strauss, 1991, 1993, 1997, 2007). Lyons and Kuron (2013) emphasize that management science researchers have avoided the rich traditions of social sciences regarding the more profound frameworks of generational theories and favoured a purely empirical and schematic generational division based solely on the criterion of birth year, thus each year complementing the “paleontological chronicle” of generational studies. *More rigorous methodologies* regarding the quality of research selection are also needed.

What is more, Lyons and Kuron (2013) recommend a *contextual approach* – when generational differences are investigated in a country with a unique socio-historical and cultural context, since generations are products of a socio-historical context and national culture (e.g., Deal et al., 2012). Also, the effects of variables must be considered: a) organizational – for example, the size of the sector or organization, organizational culture and structure; b) individual – for example, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, family status and position (Joshi et al., 2010; Laufer and Bengtson, 1974; Parry and Urwin, 2011).

The paper attempts to apply all the abovementioned suggestions to the research and will provide a theoretical framework and conceptual model of research on the multigenerational workforce’s personal and work values and their correlation. The Latvian Republic as a Nordic country with a developed economy and unique socio-historical and

cultural context would complement the theoretical understanding of the contextual aspect of generational theory.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF FUTURE RESEARCH

To carry out research on the multigenerational workforce's personal and work values and their correlation through the analysis of the multigenerational workforce's value systems and their contributing external and internal environmental factors in Latvia, the paper developed a theoretical framework of the evolution of an individual's personal values, which schematically shows the process of an individual's personal value formation and adjustment as shown in Fig. 3.

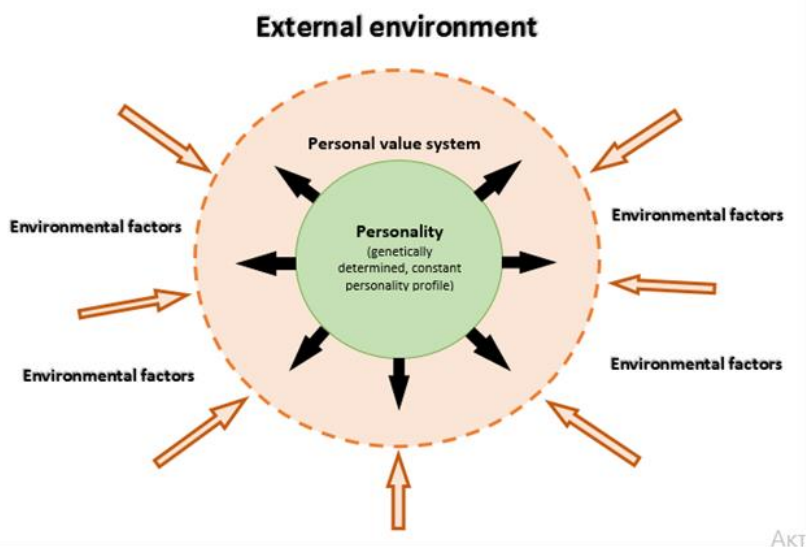


Figure 3. Theoretical framework of research on generational differences: the process of an individual's personal value formation and adjustment (*developed by the authors*)

According to social adaptation theory (Kahle, 1983), values are types of social conclusions that help individuals to adapt to the external environment by behaving in various situations in concordance with their values as shown in Fig. 3. Several sources could serve as the origin of values, including national culture, regional community, religion, family and company (Finkelstein, Hambrick and Cannella, 2009). The value system of an individual usually forms a hierarchical structure where some values have a significantly bigger role and are favoured over others. The value system amply demonstrates the importance a person attaches to such phenomena as freedom, enjoyment, self-esteem, honesty, love, obedience, equality, etc. (Feather, 1975; Zavalloni, 1980). When some of the values are learned, or accepted (adapted), they become a part of the value system where each value has its own priority size, thus creating a value hierarchy that affects the decision process depending on the significance of each value. (Hambrick and Brandon, 1988). Meanwhile, the process of work value formation among different

generations and the overall future study design is shown schematically in the form of a conceptual model of research in Fig. 4:

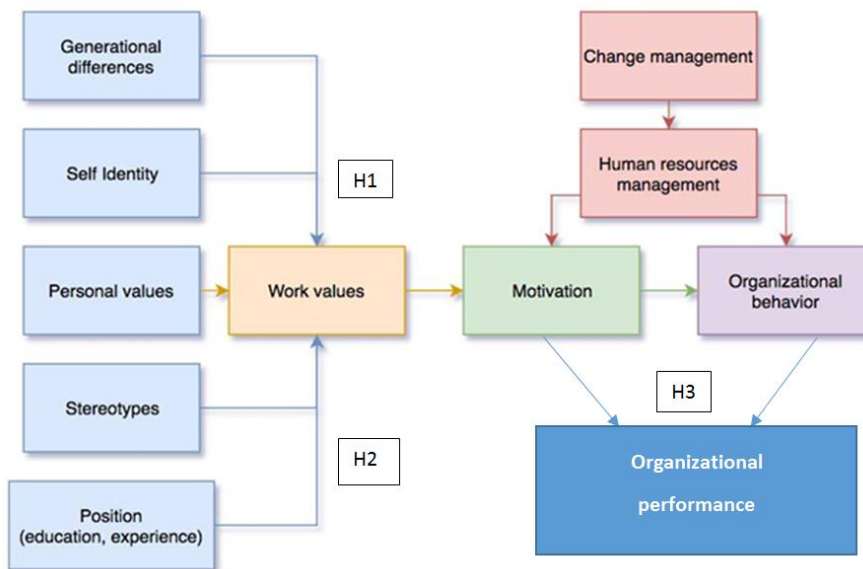


Figure 4. Conceptual model of future research on the multigenerational workforce's personal and work values (developed by the authors)

Therefore, we have identified human resource variables – generational differences, self-identity, personal values, stereotypes, education and experience – as independent variables. Change management in terms of human resource management, particularly organizational behaviour and motivation, are moderating variables. When it comes to dependent variables, organizational performance is defined as the end performance results of all the organization's work practices and activities reflected by financial metrics (profitability – return on invested capital (ROIC), sales growth rate and market share) and non-financial metrics (staff productivity, personnel turnover and quality of service) (Agarwal, 2014).

Therefore, for the future research agenda, the paper put forward the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** Does generational chronological division according to generational theories (Mannheim, 1952, Howe and Strauss 1991, 1993, 1997, 2007) exist in Latvia, a Nordic country with a developed economy and a unique socio-historical context?
- **RQ2:** Do members of the multigenerational workforce identify themselves as belonging to certain generations?
- **RQ3:** What could lead to generational conflict at work and what leads to productivity?

Three hypotheses that follow the proposed research questions have been advanced:

- **H1:** Multigenerational differences regarding the personal and work values of employees do not exist to the extent that they could be linked solely to the age criterion or generational dimension.
- **H2:** The multigenerational differences regarding the personal and work values of employees clearly correlate with the level of maturity of the individual (position, education and experience) – the compliance of the individual's values with the specific hierarchy level of the value system's development (Graves, 1974, Beck and Cowan, 2006).
- **H3:** A clear correlation exists between the multigenerational workforce's personal and work values, human resource management practice (motivation and organizational behaviour) and productivity of personnel.

Therefore, our future research on differences in work values in the multigenerational workforce will be the first attempt in the context of the Latvian labour market to obtain empirical evidence both for the existence of those differences and for a deeper understanding of specific work values that differ the most among employees from different generations in Latvia, which will be of great value for human resource management (HRM) practices in commercial enterprises.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In today's turbulent business environment business leaders find themselves managing people from various generations and there is a need to adapt the workplace to the multigenerational workforce. The difference in managing people from distinct generations is becoming especially pronounced due to different personal and work values. In Latvia, issues behind managing a multigenerational workforce are also defined by demographic factors. If the country complies with the World Bank's recommendations, it is possible that the workforce will consist of people from three or four different generations. In addition to the problem of managing the multigenerational workforce, there is a general gap in scientific research regarding the personal and work values of economically active people in Latvia.

To carry out research on personal and work values of different generations and how they are interrelated through an analysis of internal and external factors affecting their value systems, the authors have advanced a conceptual model of research. The model reflects a theoretical framework for understanding values of different generations and how they are formed and changed. Four further streams of research are suggested for a deeper understanding of the correlation between personal and work values in the context of generational differences in the workplace. Therefore, the paper can potentially contribute to the current scientific discussion of the multigenerational workforce's personal and work values.

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