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# Differences in Work Expectations Held by Differing Generations of American Workers

Jeanian Clark  
*Old Dominion University*

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DIFFERENCES IN WORK EXPECTATIONS HELD BY DIFFERING  
GENERATIONS OF AMERICAN WORKERS

A Research Study Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Department of Occupational and Technical Studies  
At Old Dominion University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Science

By

Jeanian Clark, PHR

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The workplace contains four distinct generations of employees. Each brings its own unique perspective and sets of expectations (Kaye & Evans, 2005). These generations can all have different opinions of their organizations' leadership, the value of previous work experience, use of technology, and ideas about employer loyalty. The workplace generations can present many challenges to employers. The generational cohorts often have different job satisfiers when it comes to employee career development plans, flexibility, autonomy, work schedules, and compensation and rewards packages. Often, when the dynamic demands of workplace needs and wants clash, the ethics of both the employer and employees can be called into question.

As employers continue to encounter workplace differences in the generations of the workforce, managers continue to express a number of common concerns about these differences and their affect upon the organization (Wendover, Gariulo & Dedini, 2006). The generations have been quick to blame the work ethic of other generations in the decay of the workforce and its organizational culture. Managers are expected to oversee much more than just the products or services of their companies. They often have to individually customize each employee's requests for work/life balance, professional development, and motivation triggers. Many even find themselves in a situation of managing employees who are older than themselves.

This leads many organizations and leaders to wonder how the future of the workforce will adapt to manage the complexities of the work environment. American organizations and leaders must attempt to understand these generational differences in

order to attract and retain the workforce of tomorrow to keep American industry globally competitive.

### STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The problem of the study was to determine differences in work expectations held by differing generations of American workers to prepare employers for future changes in employee retention, engagement, and recruitment.

### RESEARCH GOALS

To guide the study, the following questions have been developed:

1. Are there generational differences in the beliefs about what it means to work hard, take initiative, or contribute to the organization?
2. Are there differences in the expectations of a work and life balance among the four generations of employees?
3. Do differences among generational cohorts exist in the expectations about compensation and rewards?
4. Does each generation take a different approach to career development? How do these approaches differ?

### BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

It is difficult at best for leading global organizations to respond to the unpredictable market driven economy. If an organization is fortunate enough to recruit promising young talent to grow the organization, they still are facing an uphill retention

battle to keep this talent engaged and employed with them for the long term. The future human capital of the organization is often caught in generational clashes with older seasoned employees over issues like work ethic, respect for authority, dress codes, and every work arrangement imaginable. Company leaders are not sure what to do about it. “The newest diversity issue on the block is generational diversity” (Martin & Tulgan, 2002, p. xi).

This is the first time in the history of the American workforce that we have had four distinct generations at work in our places of employment. Generational conflicts can often impact the bottom line of organizations in many ways.

That includes corporate cultures that short-circuit recruiting efforts, lost productivity, costly failures of communication and resentment at slanted rewards programs. Some 70% of companies have flex time and telework policies, but if boomer managers don't like them or don't trust working that way, they truly frustrate the purpose (Krotz, 2004, p. 1).

In our global economy, employers and managers must draw upon the different talent and skills of each group. These differences fuel innovation and positively impact productivity gains for American employers. If a generation of cohorts question the integrity of another generations' work ethic, this can only lengthen the divide of our productivity and future success.

It is important that we understand the need to identify the different work expectations among generations. Organizations and leaders have much to loose if gaps in expectations are not closed. If the younger two generations do not capture the institutional knowledge of the older two generations before their departure from the

workforce, intellectual property will be lost and productivity will suffer. This will negatively impact the organizations' ability to compete. If the two older workforce generations do not open up to the possibility of culture change in their organization, the company will be unable to recruit or retain a new workforce for the future prosperity of their company.

It is no longer about how workers must adapt to their employers, but how companies must adapt to the new work world (Izzo & Withers, 2006). To better address retention issues and be more effective in managing an intergenerational workforce, organizations must understand the expectations of the different generations. With this information, companies will be better prepared to adopt an innovative management style to motivate employees to work together and minimize conflict (Lockwood, 2004).

### LIMITATIONS

This research was limited to a stratified sample of employees at Lord Fairfax Community College. Generational characteristics are not absolute and may be interchangeable between generations. The respondents must have an accurate self perception of their own practice of work ethics when responding to the survey. Conceptual limitations could exist in responding to the questionnaire due to the varying levels of employees within the institution. Employees range in level from classified staff with high school diplomas to faculty who possess doctorate degrees.

## ASSUMPTIONS

The assumptions of this research study were as follows:

1. There are four distinct generations at work in America: Matures, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y.
2. Generational differences cause loss of productivity and profit for American organizations and institutions.
3. Differences in generational work expectations cause disruptions to employer work environments and cultures.

## PROCEDURES

This study described differences in the specific behaviors that are defined as expectations by employees of different generations. The data used for this study included a survey completed by the employees of Lord Fairfax Community College. The survey was conducted in a stratified random sample. The independent variables were the four generational classifications of employees. The dependent variable was the behavior or definition of workplace expectations by the employees.

The Human Resources Department of the college agreed to provide ten random employees from each of the four generations of workers. There will be a total of 40 employees asked to participate in the survey. A cover letter and survey will be sent to each employee.

## DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The following terms clarify the interpretation of this study:

Generation – A group of people that share a small span of birth years. The people in these groups are influenced by social and cultural events, especially in their formative years.

Cohort - A group of people belonging to a labeled generation.

Matures or Traditionalists – People born between the years of 1933 – 1945, approximately 34 million Americans.

Baby Boomers or “Boomers” – People born between the years of 1946 – 1964, approximately 76 million Americans.

Generation X or Gen X or X’ers – People born between the years of 1965 – 1976, approximately 41 million Americans.

Generation Y or Millennial or 4<sup>th</sup> generation - People born between the years of 1977-1998, approximately 75 million Americans.

Workforce – Employees of an organization, industry, or region.

Organizational Culture – The norms, values, communication, and climate of an employers work place environment.

## OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER I

Chapter I identifies some potential problems of employing four generations in the workforce. Employers and leaders are challenged by the differing levels of commitment and work ethic between the generational employees. Organizations need to attract and retain the younger generations of workers for the future prosperity of American

companies, yet they struggle with balancing this younger generations expectations against their current organization's employees and culture. Chapter II is a review of the literature. It will explore what organizations, employees, and experts have to say about the differences in the generational definitions of work ethics and the American workforce.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter describes literature relevant to the research purposes of this study. It is organized into four sections: (1) generational differences in the beliefs about what it means to work hard, take initiative, or contribute to the organization, (2) differences in the expectations of a work and life balance among the four generations of employees, (3) differences among employees related to expectations about compensation and rewards, (4) and approaches to career development. At the end of each section, the relevance of the literature to the research reported in this study is discussed.

#### GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN BELIEFS ABOUT WORKING HARD

It is difficult to define what it means to work hard in the American workforce culture without considering the term work ethic. Employers will tell you a strong work ethic is the most desired characteristic in a new employee. Companies seek employees who are dependable, have good people skills, and demonstrate initiative. Prior studies have associated these characteristics with a high level of work ethic (Hill & Petty, 1994). Individuals with a strong work ethic place a positive value on doing a good job and often describe work as having an intrinsic value of its own (Hill, 2005). Employers value this strong work ethic because of the economic benefits it provides to the companies' bottom line. Businesses with engaged employees who are committed to their work have a competitive market advantage. When new employees lack these skills an organization is at risk of losing productivity and profits.

The work ethic of Matures has been described as work until they can physically give no more. The Boomers have been categorized as working long hours and telling you about it. Generation X often is seen as putting their personal life first, however work is still important. Finally, the Millennials have been described as putting their lifestyle first and expecting to integrate it into their work (Kaye & Evans, 2005).

Matures are noted for valuing hierarchy and security, and tend to be better team players than all other generations. They embody the importance of achieving common goals. This generation is full of experience and has built many traditional and successful corporations through their hard work and loyalty. Employers appreciate this cohort for their hard work and conformism. Companies like Toys 'R' Us, The Home Depot, and Anheuser-Busch have recently partnered with AARP to match job seeking matures with employers (Kaye & Evans, 2005). The cohort of matures have low absenteeism and a high need to contribute to the success of an organization. They tend to value and look forward toward leisure activities and retirement more so than those of the Boomer Generation (Hill, 2005).

Boomers have been perceived as a cohort who has a drive to get it done at all costs. This intrinsic drive has made them phenomenally successful. When compared to employees in other age groups, they are viewed as placing a higher value on work, missing fewer work days, and being more dedicated to contributing to their organization (Hill, 2005). Boomers were brought up to believe that work was essential to success, and that it formed the cornerstone of a moral life. The idea that one could accomplish anything as long as they were willing to sacrifice and work hard is a fundamental belief to the Baby Boomer generation (Lern, 2006). The large number of individuals in this

population meant increased competition for everything from admission to the best colleges, securing the best jobs, and gaining promotion in the organization.

Competitiveness was essential to success. Their work world has always been highly competitive environment. Boomers have held on to this competitive trait throughout their careers. This exact work ethic often conflicts with the two younger generations who see the Baby Boomers as having sacrificed everything, including family, for their own achievement of success. On the other hand, Boomers see the work initiative of the younger two generations as an unwillingness to pay their dues and contribute to the organization while waiting patiently at their turn for success.

Xers have much less employment competition, because there are fewer of them, and many more choices of employment options. These two factors have contributed to a social change in what it means for them to work hard and take initiative. In addition, this generation has seen their parents, who have worked loyally for a company, become downsized and cutback. Job security became a thing of the past during their formative years. Therein lays the suggestion that hard work, sacrifice, and giving your life energy to an organization are not necessary to achieve success. Professional success was translated to a free agent idealism.

Generation X was initially labeled as being lazy, disloyal and arrogant; however they have an independent and entrepreneurial work spirit. They are currently the most sought after workers in the market place. They can be very hard working when focused and motivated by a goal. In fact, they will work 3.6 percent more hours each week than the national work average (Martin & Tulgan, 2002).

Generation Y is all about speed, customizations, and interactivity in their lives and their work environment. Freedom and flexibility are an integral part of their work ethic, and they will not tolerate any form of micromanagement. They are poised to be the most demanding generation in history. They grew up in a collaborative classroom environment and have been much more groomed to be great team players in the work environment. Seventy percent of this generation expects to work in professional jobs, earning very high salaries by the time they are 30. The Y Generation believes that employers are responsible for creating an environment that makes them want to come to work (Martin & Tulgan, 2002). They have less life experience than any other generation in deferring personal pleasure and career attainment. This has given them both more confidence and an overblown sense of entitlement (Izzo & Withers, 2006).

Baby Boomers are constantly frustrated with the ‘in-one-ear-and-out-the-other’ phenomenon of Generation Y (Sopp, 2006). Millennials process information selectively due to the abundance of media resources at their fingertips. They can not process all the information coming at them, so they do not take it all in, and selectively choose what topics deserve their focus. They bring these behaviors to their work place. This makes them appear inconsistent and not accountable for assigned tasks. This can lead to end products that are incomplete. “This is especially true when they act like they ‘got it’ but actually didn’t and tuned you out too quickly” (Sopp, 2006, p. 116).

For managers who supervise employees of different generations, it is important to be cognizant of the generational differences in what it means to work hard and take initiative to contribute to the organization. In a survey by the Society of Human Resource Management regarding generational differences in the workplace, 51% of HR

professionals felt employees of different generations work effectively together.

However, common areas of conflict reported were work ethic, managing change, and organizational hierarchy (Lockwood, 2006).

The literature reviewed demonstrated a great deal of evidence on the definitions of work ethic among the Mature and Baby Boomer generations. The vast majority of literature reviewed for the younger two generations crossed over from the preferences of individual work ethic to the importance of defining corporate work ethics, corporate values, and moral conduct. In an era of corporate ethics scandals at companies such as Enron and WorldCom, it appears there is a gap in the information about understanding a generations' or individuals' preference on ethics. The information and media on this topic appears to be more focused on organizations defining this for individuals in the wake of such scandal.

#### GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN WORK AND LIFE BALANCE

As aging workplace veterans begin vacating their jobs in top and middle leadership ranks, employers are discovering an unsettling trend: The best and the brightest in the ranks may not want these positions even if it means more money (Gentrends, 2005). Employers faced with challenges in hiring and retaining key talent must identify strategies to win employee loyalty. Employers need to somehow spark their interest in contributing to the leadership in their organization. A Fortune magazine poll of national recruiters recently determined that employees most likely to turn down lucrative job offers have flex time at their current employer (Izzo & Withers, 2006). One of the best predictors of retention for women is whether they sense they can attend to

personal life and still develop in the company. It appears that as the economy continues to speed up, so do the desires of employees to add balance to their lives by devoting more time to pursuits outside of work.

Today's literature points toward the growing trend in the importance of a work and life balance expectation among Generations X and Y. Four areas important to work life balance have been identified as family, work, leisure, and health (spiritual and physical). Data support that our society has been tipping the scale toward the work factor at the expense of the other three categories since the 1950's. Time spent on the job has increased by 163 hours per year over the last 20 years, while leisure has decreased by one-third (Izzo & Withers, 2006).

Matures and Boomers have often devoted themselves to their work at the expense of their own personal growth and sometimes even family life. Their children, the X generation, have been most impacted by this factor. As a result, Xers have developed a focus on a clear balance between work and other personal aspects of life. Millennials, still new to the workforce, appear to be placing the same high emphasis on this issue (Wendover & Gargiulo, 2006).

As the Baby Boomer generation continues to age, fewer are willing to keep up the pace that made them hugely successful at work during the 1970s and 80s. Some are even leading the movement toward more family-friendly workplaces and work/life balance initiatives. Generation X will define their success by their ability to create the life they want. It appears that many from this generational cohort define life by family, friends, hobbies, vacations, and the time to enjoy them (Martin & Tulgan, 2002). More than

older workers, Generation X employees view work as secondary to their lives outside of the office (Chao, 2005).

Employees may need the company itself to take the lead on the balance issue. In a recent survey, forty-one percent of managers say they are disappointed with the work/life balance they find at their company, and eighty-five percent believe vacation time should be mandatory. The same survey reports that 48 percent say they feel guilty when they leave the job on time or take time off. The survey suggests that the root cause of this inequity could be the “face time” tradition, whereby work is measured by physical presence on the job versus job output per employee. A separate survey seems to support this idea with 55 percent of all managers admitting that long hours actually made them less productive (Wendover & Gargiulo, 2006).

Affording employees some flexibility to balance their own priorities often leads to better performance as well as higher retention rates. According to Spherion’s annual Emerging Workforce Study, 60 percent of workers of all ages rate time and flexibility as a very important factor in retention. Only 35 percent of employers felt the same way (Chao, 2005). Employers who wish to recruit and retain top talent in their organizations will need to take this balance under consideration.

The only option the review of literature presented to address this balance of work and life was flextime solutions. There were no other alternatives identified in the research. Could other alternatives besides flextime options exist to help address a work/life balance? Would such options as telecommuting, project based work, job sharing, on-site child daycare, elder daycare, or other alternatives be of value in achieving this balance for the younger generations?

## EXPECTATIONS ABOUT COMPENSATION AND REWARDS

Most employers can unanimously agree that compensation and rewards are both significant factors in the recruitment, engagement, and retention of employees. Years of observation and study have gone into the Herzberg Hygiene motivation model which explores hygiene and motivation factors for employee recruitment and motivation. Different generations appear to possess different beliefs about the rewards that a job should provide. How do employers reconcile these differences? Rewards come down to what each group seeks in return for its time and effort (Wendover & Garguilo, 2006, p. 136).

Matures come from a period in time that taught them duty to country and community. They intrinsically feel rewarded for a job well done. They value being well compensated like everyone else; however they take pride in what they have accomplished.

They grew up learning a penny saved is a penny earned and they have moderate expectations about compensation. Even in their older age, they remain conservative spenders, opting to forego short term pleasure rather than spending impulsively.

Baby Boomers derive their rewards from the recognition they receive for their contributions to the organization. This generation values an employer who rewards them by noticing them and thanking them for their dedication and commitment. The Boomers are generally annoyed with the younger two generations' apparent disinterest in loyalty and commitment to a company. Some employers, in their attempts to engage generations X and Y, have overlooked the expertise and contributions of their Boomer employees causing anger and resentment among this cohort toward their employers.

Boomers have been made to rethink their goals about compensation and possibly working into their retirement years. Over their lifetime, Boomers have racked up enough consumer debt to seriously endanger their ability to retire in a timely fashion. They were the first of the credit card generation. Many have accrued considerable debt which they will be forced to pay down in their later years.

Members of the X Generation often consider their job more of a contract, and thereby apply more practical expectations to being rewarded. They expect fair compensation and seek the opportunity to earn extra for doing extra. Generation X came of age watching their parents spend extravagantly. Thus far, they have chosen the more conservative path of saving and spending prudently.

They value the opportunity to build skills and credentials that will position them for future employment opportunities there or elsewhere. Generation X knows their security rests in staying on the cutting edge. "Jobs may come and jobs may go, but my career belongs to me" (Martin & Tulgan, 2002, p. 31). As long as they are challenged, growing professionally, and enjoying the work itself, they will generally stay with an employer. When any of these variables change, they will quickly move on to their next opportunity.

They greatly value time off as a reward, which will provide the important balance they seek in work and life. Gen X has time boundaries, and they use those boundaries effectively. Many feel that one of the greatest gifts of this generation to the rest of the generations is introducing the expectations of work/life balance (Kay & Evans, 2005). They tend to seek a work environment that promotes an enjoyable atmosphere whereby work is not taken too seriously.

Millennials have expectations that employers should provide fun and stimulation for rewards. Employers' embracing these desires have been able to maintain lower turnover and higher productivity from this generation (Wendover & Garguilo, 2006). Waving money in the faces of Generation Y as a hiring tool is often a futile effort (Kaye & Evans, 2005). What makes a job more appealing is flexibility and freedom, not ladder climbing or cash. Generation Y is said to value the highly engaging time with their parents and authority figures at work. Some speculate this is due to their parents being so busy earning dual incomes and working long hours to get ahead (Sopp, 2006).

Millennials are displaying spending habits remarkably similar to the Baby Boomers. Many of them have learned to spend substantial amounts of money at an earlier age than previous generations, and their attitudes about spending are a concern for many.

The changing nature of modern employment in our economy will continue to dramatically reduce job stability. Younger workers and the increasing number of contract employees may not appreciate or embrace the incentives or compensation that motivated the workforce of the past (McCortney & Engels, 2003).

Acknowledgement for work well done and rewarding employees with flexibility and freedom appear to be two key elements for recognition and rewards among all four generations of employees in the review of literature. Many employers currently offer cafeteria benefit plans for employees, whereby an employee has the power to choose among benefits that most closely meet their needs on an annual basis. Would such a cafeteria program in compensation and rewards better suit the desire for customization

among the four generations? The literature did not reveal any such program or study in practice.

### EXPECTATIONS ABOUT CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Today's workplaces contain a more flat organizational hierarchy than compared to the past. To stay competitive, companies are driven to stay lean and productive. The traditional career ladder has shrunk considerably over the last fifty years, thus changing the way employees define career development. The linear career path is no longer common place, and individuals now consider lateral career moves, promotions into other departments, and transitory career paths as viable options for developing their career. If employers are concerned about retaining key talent for longevity, they must partner with employees of all generations to understand career development expectations. Career building skills are the new security and companies that fail to provide them loose out (Izzo & Withers, 2006).

Career development, as it is defined today, was not part of the consideration for much of the Mature generation. As young adults entering the workforce, they were conditioned to believe that one should be thankful to even have a job. The ultimate goal was to move up within your organization. The one thing no one wanted to do was leave the company. Today, Traditionalist can further their career development by demonstrating a willingness to bridge the technology gap, not just the generation gap (Lancaster, 2003).

Career development truly emerged with the Baby Boomers. The landmark book by Richard Bolles, *What Color is Your Parachute?*, was the beginning of the Boomers' proactive focus on career development expectations. They have focused on taking the

initiative to manage their careers usually within one organization or at least one industry.

Generation X has always been regarded for taking a proactive approach to career development since they entered the workforce. Having witnessed the mergers, acquisitions, and layoffs of their parents in the workforce, they resolved early on to take charge of their own career development and career destiny. The key word for them is versatility. The more degrees or experiences they can acquire, the more they are able to manage their own career opportunities (Wendover & Gargiulo, 2006). This principle is that they earned the reputation of not being loyal to an organization, but loyal only to themselves.

Generation X sees career development as a way of keeping challenged. They often see employers as stops along the way to build their portfolio of skills. Gen Xers do not even feel obligated to remain in the same industry, let alone stay at the same employer. Organizations can tap into their desire for development by helping them to identify new career options internal to the organization.

Millennials are just now entering the workforce in large numbers. To date, they have appeared to place the same emphasis on versatility as Generation X. Generation Y comes to the workplace with higher education and work experience than those generations of the past, so they do not view themselves as new to the organization. They expect to be given the space to try new things and to have autonomy in their work (Sopp, 2006).

This generation appears to crave mentoring for career development. Millennials want to understand the history or background of a situation. They do not understand why managers are so set in their ways and are so impatient with their questions. They are

hypersensitive to being dismissed and given canned answers. Baby Boomers have often misconstrued this as the Y generation challenging their authority.

The review of literature revealed information regarding career development for Baby Boomers and Generation X. It is understandable why there was a lack of information for Generation Y, as they are so new to the workforce. There was sparse information regarding what the Mature generation would now value in regards to their own career development. Has society dismissed their potential contribution to the workforce? They have a great deal of institutional knowledge and experience they could offer to the other generations. Do they have a desire to mentor others, or perhaps operate as business consultants to organizations?

#### SUMMARY

This chapter reviews the current literature about work expectations held by different generations of American workers. The review highlights the differences in beliefs about what it means to work hard and contribute to an organization. It explores differences in expectations of a work and life balance among the four generations. The review includes information regarding generational expectations about compensation and rewards. Finally, it investigates the different approaches that the generations take with career development. Chapter III of this research report describes the methods and procedures of the study.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to determine if generational differences exist in employee work expectations. The information in this chapter describes the methods and procedures initiated in order to reach the goals of this study. The population of the study and the instrument design are described. The methods for gathering data and analysis are presented. The chapter concludes with a summary of the methods and procedures.

### POPULATION

The population used in this study was a stratified random sampling of full time employees at Lord Fairfax Community College. There were 170 full-time employees including faculty, classified staff, and administrators at the college during the time of the study. The population does not include any adjunct faculty, wage employees, part time staff, or work studies who represent part time employees of the college. A total of forty surveys were distributed, ten for each of the four generation in the workforce. The Human Resources Director of Lord Fairfax Community College agreed to provide ten random names from each of the four generations of employees.

### INSTRUMENT DESIGN

The instrument used in this descriptive research study was a survey given to a random stratified sampling of full time employees of Lord Fairfax Community College. The survey was designed to query participants about their work expectations. The survey contained closed-ended questions on work expectations based on the research goals and

literature to develop the survey questions. The categories include questions on work initiative, work and life balance, expectations about compensation and rewards, and expectations about career development. The closed-ended questions were based on a 5-point Likert scale designed to elicit their preferences on work expectations.

#### METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The survey was sent to all participants with a cover letter attached to the instrument. The cover letter explained the purpose of the study and gave incentive for returning the instrument in a timely manner. Each participant who completed and returned the survey in the allotted timeframe was given a chance to win over one million dollars via a lottery ticket purchased for them. The survey was distributed on October 17, 2006. The participants were assured in the cover letter that their responses would be kept confidential and the findings would be reported as aggregate data.

#### STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

After the completed surveys were returned, the data were tabulated. The frequencies and median of responses were calculated for each of the four generations responding to the survey.

#### SUMMARY

The research methods and procedures outlined in this chapter have included the population, instrument design, methods for collecting data, and determining the statistical

analysis of the information gathered in the survey. The data collected from the surveys will be presented in Chapter IV, entitled Findings.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine if generational differences exist in employee work expectations. The population used in this study was a stratified random sampling of full time employees at Lord Fairfax Community College. There were 170 full-time employees including faculty, classified staff, and administrators at the college during the time of the study. A total of forty surveys were distributed, ten for each of the four generation in the workforce. The survey was designed to query participants about their work expectations. The survey contained closed-ended questions on work expectations based on the four research goals. The research goals were organized into four sections: (1) generational differences in the beliefs about what it means to work hard, take initiative, or contribute to the organization, (2) differences in the expectations of a work and life balance among the four generations of employees, (3) differences among employees related to expectations about compensation and rewards, (4) and approaches to career development.

### RESPONSE TO THE SURVEY

A total of forty surveys were distributed, ten for each of the four generation in the workforce. Thirty-four surveys were returned for an 85 percent response rate. The Mature survey participant response was eighty percent, or a total of 8 returned surveys. The Baby Boomer survey participant response was ninety percent, or a total of 9 returned surveys. The Generation X survey participant response was eighty percent, or a total of 8

returned surveys. The Generation Y survey participant response was ninety percent, or a total of 9 returned surveys.

## RESULTS ON GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN WORKING HARD, TAKING INITIATIVE, AND CONTRIBUTING TO AN ORGANIZATION

There were five closed ended statements to which participants responded how strongly they agreed or disagreed on a five-point Likert Scale. There was also one rank order question in this category whereby participants ranked five items in importance regarding their beliefs about taking initiative, working hard, and contributing to an organization.

### **I possess an entrepreneurial work spirit in the way I approach my job.**

The majority of Matures, eighty seven and a half percent, strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. Eighty nine percent of Baby Boomers strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. The clear majority of Generation X, eighty seven and a half percent, strongly agreed or agreed they possess an entrepreneurial work spirit in the way they approach their job. Sixty seven percent of Generation Y strongly agreed or agreed with the question, while thirty three percent of was neutral. The overall grand median was that survey respondents agreed with this statement. See Table 1.

### **Competition among employees is healthy for an organizations' culture.**

Most Matures surveyed, 50 percent, agreed with this statement. Fifty five percent of Boomers strongly agreed or agreed with this statement, while forty four percent were neutral. A majority of Generation X, seventy five percent, were neutral on this question. Forty four percent of Generation Y disagreed that competition among employees is

healthy for an organization, while thirty-three percent of Generation Y agreed that competition was healthy for employees of an organization. The grand median response to this statement was neutral. See Table 1.

**I feel intrinsically rewarded when I know I am contributing at a high level to my organization.**

One hundred percent of responses from Matures, Baby Boomers, and Generation Y strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. Eighty seven and a half percent of Generation X agreed with this statement. One person from Gen X, or twelve and a half percent, was neutral. The grand median response was employees strongly agreed they feel intrinsically rewarded when they know they are contributing at high levels to their organization. See Table 1.

**My sense of job security is most highly impacted by my organizations success.**

One hundred percent of Matures strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. Only forty-four percent of Baby Boomers strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. The majority, or fifty five percent, of Baby Boomers were neutral. Sixty two and a half percent of Generation X strongly agreed or agreed with this statement, yet thirty seven and a half percent of Gen X disagreed. The majority of Generation Y, or seventy eight percent, strongly agreed or agreed. Twenty two percent were neutral to the question. The grand median response was employees agree their sense of job security is most highly impacted by their organization's success. See Table 1.

**My sense of job security is most highly impacted by my own market value.**

Most of the Matures, sixty two percent, agreed with the statement, while a quarter of Matures were neutral. Sixty-seven percent of the Baby Boomers agreed with the question, while thirty-three percent who replied were neutral. The majority of Generation X, sixty two and a half percent, strongly agreed or agreed with this statement while twenty five percent of Gen X were neutral. The overwhelming majority of Generation Y, seventy eight percent, strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. Eleven percent of Generation Y were neutral and an additional eleven percent disagreed. The grand median response was that employees agreed their sense of job security was most highly impacted by their own market value. See Table 1.

The final question in this section of the survey was a rank order question based on the beliefs about what each generation defined as taking initiative, working hard and contributing to an organizations' success. All generations ranked 'dependability' as the single most important factor in working hard and taking initiative with an overall grand mean of 1.2. The Matures and Generation X ranked 'paying your dues' as the least most important factor with a mean response of 4.6 and 4.4 respectively. The Baby Boomers ranked 'actual numbers of hours worked' as the least most important factor with a mean response of 4.1. Finally, Generation Y ranked 'personal sacrifice for the benefit of the organization' as the least important factor with a mean score of 4.1. The overall grand mean response as the least most important factor in contributing to an organization was tied between 'actual number of hours worked' and 'paying your dues', which both had a mean of 3.9. See Table 1.

TABLE 1

## Working Hard, Taking Initiative, and Contributing to an Organization

## Number of Responses and Median

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Median
I possess an entrepreneurial work spirit in the way I approach my job.	M=2 B=3 X=3 Y=2	M=5 B=5 X=4 Y=4	M=1 B=1 X=1 Y=3	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=Agree B=Agree X=Agree Y=Agree
Competition among employees is healthy for an organizations culture.	M=0 B=1 X=0 Y=0	M=4 B=4 X=1 Y=3	M=3 B=4 X=6 Y=2	M=1 B=0 X=1 Y=4	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=Neutral B=Agree X=Neutral Y=Neutral
I feel intrinsically rewarded when I know I am contributing at a high level to my organization.	M=4 B=6 X=3 Y=4	M=4 B=3 X=4 Y=5	M=0 B=0 X=1 Y=0	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=Strongly Agree B=Strongly Agree X=Agree Y=Agree
My sense of job security is most highly impacted by my organizations success.	M=1 B=2 X=2 Y=2	M=7 B=2 X=3 Y=5	M=0 B=5 X=0 Y=2	M=0 B=0 X=3 Y=0	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=Agree B=Neutral X=Agree Y=Agree
My sense of job security is most highly impacted by my own market value.	M=0 B=0 X=1 Y=2	M=5 B=6 X=4 Y=5	M=2 B=3 X=2 Y=1	M=1 B=0 X=1 Y=1	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=Agree B=Agree X=Agree Y=Agree
Rank these items in importance regarding beliefs about taking initiative, working hard, and contributing to an organization:						
Actual number of hours worked.	M=4.0 B=4.1 X=3.5 Y=3.8					
<b>MEAN RESPONSE</b> 1 Highest – 5 Lowest						
Personal sacrifice for the benefit of the organization.	M=2.8 B=3.2 X=3.1 Y=4.1					
<b>MEAN RESPONSE</b> 1 Highest – 5 Lowest						
Paying your dues.	M=4.6 B=3.3 X=4.4 Y=3.2					
<b>MEAN RESPONSE</b> 1 Highest – 5 Lowest						
Getting it done at all costs.	M=2.5 B=3.1 X=2.75 Y=2.6					
<b>MEAN RESPONSE</b> 1 Highest – 5 Lowest						

Dependability.	M=1.1
	B=1.2
<b>MEAN RESPONSE</b>	X=1.3
1 Highest – 5 Lowest	Y=1.1

M=Matures  
B=Baby Boomers  
X=Generation X  
Y=Generation Y

## RESULTS IN DIFFERENCES IN THE EXPECTATIONS OF A WORK AND LIFE BALANCE AMONG THE FOUR GENERATIONS OF EMPLOYEES

There were four closed ended statements regarding expectations of a work and life balance to which participants responded how strongly they agreed or disagreed on a five-point Likert Scale. There was also one rank order question in this category whereby participants ranked five items in importance regarding items that appealed to them in achieving a work and life balance.

### **I feel guilty when I leave work on time.**

The majority of Matures, fifty percent, disagreed with this statement; however twenty five percent of matures agreed with the question. Fifty five percent of Boomers disagreed with this statement while twenty two percent agreed, and another twenty two percent were neutral. All of Generation X disagreed or strongly disagreed with the question. Sixty seven percent of Generation Y also strongly disagreed or disagreed, while twenty two percent strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. The grand median response was participants disagreed that they feel guilty when they leave work on time. See Table 2.

TABLE 2

## Work and Life Balance

## Number of Responses and Median

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Median
I feel guilty when I leave work on time.	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=1	M=2 B=2 X=0 Y=1	M=0 B=2 X=0 Y=1	M=5 B=4 X=3 Y=1	M=1 B=1 X=5 Y=5	M=Disagree B=Disagree X=Strongly Disagree Y=Strongly Disagree
I feel guilty when I take vacation during a busy time.	M=0 B=2 X=1 Y=3	M=4 B=3 X=3 Y=2	M=1 B=2 X=1 Y=0	M=2 B=2 X=1 Y=3	M=1 B=0 X=2 Y=1	M=Neutral B=Agree X=Neutral Y=Agree
I would not be interested in a promotion or raise if I will have to sacrifice more of my personal time.	M=1 B=2 X=1 Y=1	M=3 B=5 X=4 Y=3	M=2 B=0 X=3 Y=3	M=2 B=2 X=0 Y=2	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=Neutral B=Agree X=Agree Y=Neutral
I have devoted myself to work at the expense of my own personal growth or family life.	M=1 B=1 X=1 Y=1	M=0 B=3 X=5 Y=0	M=2 B=1 X=2 Y=3	M=3 B=4 X=0 Y=2	M=2 B=0 X=0 Y=3	M=Disagree B=Neutral X=Agree Y=Disagree
Rank these items in the order they appeal to you.						
Telecommuting <b>MEAN RESPONSE</b> 1 Highest – 5 Lowest	M=3.9 B=2.9 X=2.9 Y=2.3					
Project-Based Work <b>MEAN RESPONSE</b> 1 Highest – 5 Lowest	M=3.1 B=2.3 X=2.9 Y=3.2					
Job Sharing <b>MEAN RESPONSE</b> 1 Highest – 5 Lowest	M=2.3 B=3.7 X=3.75 Y=3.5					
Child Care / Elder Care <b>MEAN RESPONSE</b> 1 Highest – 5 Lowest	M=4.1 B=4.2 X=3.75 Y=3.4					
Contributing to Leadership Decisions <b>MEAN RESPONSE</b> 1 Highest – 5 Lowest	M=1.9 B=1.9 X=1.75 Y=2.4					

M=Matures  
B=Baby Boomers  
X=Generation X  
Y=Generation Y

**I feel guilty when I take vacation during a busy time.**

The majority of Matures, fifty percent, agreed with this statement; however, thirty seven and a half percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Fifty five percent of Boomers agreed with this statement while twenty two percent were neutral and another twenty two percent disagreed. Fifty percent of Generation X agreed with feeling guilty taking vacation during a busy time, however thirty seven and a half percent of them disagreed with feeling guilty. The majority of Generation Y, sixty seven percent, strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. Forty four percent of Gen Y disagreed or strongly disagreed with feeling guilty. The overall grand median for all participants were they agreed they felt guilty when taking a vacation during a busy time. See Table 2.

**I would not be interested in a promotion or raise if I will have to sacrifice more of my personal time.**

Fifty percent of the Matures agreed they would not be interested in a promotion or raise if they had to sacrifice more of their personal time; however twenty five percent of them disagreed with the statement. The majority of Boomers, seventy eight percent, strongly agreed or agreed they would not be interested in a promotion. Twenty two percent of Boomers disagreed with this statement. Over one third of Generation X, thirty seven and half percent, were neutral on this statement. The majority of Generation X responded they would agree they would not be interested in a raise or promotion at the sacrifice of their personal time. One third of Generation Y, thirty three percent, were neutral on this statement. The majority of Generation Y, forty four percent, agreed they would not be interested in a raise or a promotion. The overall grand median response

was that participants agree they would not be interested in a promotion or raise if they would have to sacrifice more of their personal time. See Table 2.

**I have devoted myself to work at the expense of my own Personal growth or family life.**

Fifty percent of the Matures disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, while twenty five percent were neutral. The Baby Boomers were evenly split on this question with forty four percent both agreeing and disagreeing with the question. The majority of Generation X, seventy five percent, strongly agreed or agreed that they have devoted themselves to work at the expense of their own growth or their family life. The majority of Generation Y, fifty five percent, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the same statement. One third of Generation Y, thirty three percent, were neutral. The overall median response was neutral to the statement. See Table 2.

The final question in this section was to rank order preferences on options that appeal to employees in maintaining a work and life balance. All generations except for Generation Y ranked ‘contributing to leadership decisions’ as the single most important factor from the choices provided. Generation Y ranked ‘telecommuting’ as the top factor with a mean of 2.3, and ‘contributing to leadership decisions’ as a close second, with a mean of 2.4. The Matures and Boomers ranked ‘child care/elder care’ as the least most important factor with a mean response of 4.1 and 4.2 respectively. Generation X ranked both ‘job sharing’ and ‘child care/elder care’ as the least important factors with a tied mean response of 3.75. Finally, Generation Y ranked ‘job sharing’ as the least important factor with a mean score of 3.5. The overall grand mean response as the least important

factor in maintaining a work and life balance was ‘child care/ elder care’ which had a mean response of 3.9. See Table 2.

### RESULTS IN DIFFERENCES AMONG EMPLOYEES RELATED TO EXPECTATIONS ABOUT REWARDS AND COMPENSATION

There were six closed ended statements regarding expectations of rewards and compensation to which participants responded how strongly they agreed or disagreed on a five-point Likert Scale.

#### **Company loyalty and longevity should be rewarded.**

The majority of both Matures and Generation X, eighty seven and a half percent, strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. Eighty nine percent of Baby Boomers strongly agreed or agreed that company loyalty and longevity should be rewarded. The entire Generation Y response, one hundred percent, strongly agreed or agreed to this question. The overall grand median was participants strongly agreed that company loyalty and longevity should be rewarded. See Table 3.

TABLE 3

#### Rewards and Compensation

#### Number of Responses and Median

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Median
Company loyalty and longevity should be rewarded.	M=5 B=5 X=5 Y=4	M=2 B=3 X=2 Y=5	M=0 B=1 X=0 Y=0	M=1 B=0 X=1 Y=0	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=Strongly Agree B=Strongly Agree X=Strongly Agree Y=Agree

I should be paid more for doing more.	M=1 B=2 X=5 Y=6	M=5 B=7 X=3 Y=3	M=1 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=1 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=Agree B=Agree X=Strongly Agree Y=Strongly Agree
I should be paid more for knowing more.	M=0 B=3 X=4 Y=5	M=6 B=4 X=3 Y=2	M=2 B=2 X=0 Y=1	M=0 B=0 X=1 Y=0	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=1	M=Agree B=Agree X=Agree Y=Strongly Agree
I would value paid time off over a cash bonus as a form of reward.	M=2 B=2 X=3 Y=2	M=2 B=3 X=4 Y=3	M=2 B=2 X=0 Y=3	M=2 B=2 X=1 Y=1	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=Neutral B=Agree X=Agree Y=Agree
I view myself more of a contract employee (free agent) rather than a traditional full time employee.	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=1 B=3 X=1 Y=2	M=2 B=1 X=0 Y=1	M=5 B=4 X=5 Y=5	M=0 B=1 X=1 Y=1	M=Disagree B=Disagree X=Disagree Y=Disagree
I would rather choose my own reward from a list of offerings rather than my boss selecting a reward for me.	M=1 B=2 X=5 Y=4	M=5 B=7 X=1 Y=4	M=2 B=0 X=2 Y=1	M=1 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=Agree B=Agree X=Strongly Agree Y=Agree

M=Matures  
B=Baby Boomers  
X=Generation X  
Y=Generation Y

### **I should be paid more for doing more.**

Seventy five percent of Matures agreed with paying more for doing more, while twelve and a half percent of Matures disagreed with the statement. One hundred percent of Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y all strongly agreed or agreed they should be paid more for doing more. The overall grand median response was participants agreed with the question. See Table 3.

### **I should be paid more for knowing more.**

Seventy five percent of Matures agreed with paying more for knowing more, while twelve and a half percent disagreed with the statement. Seventy eight percent of Baby Boomers and Generation Y strongly agreed or agreed with paying more for knowing more. The majority of Generation X, eighty seven and a half percent, strongly agreed or agreed with this question while twelve and a half percent disagreed. The

overall median response was participants agreed they should be paid more for knowing more. See Table 3.

**I would value paid time off over a cash bonus as a form of reward.**

Fifty percent of the Matures strongly agreed or agreed to valuing paid time off over a cash bonus; however twenty five percent of Matures disagreed with this statement. Fifty five percent of Boomers strongly agreed or agreed with this question while twenty two percent disagreed with the question. The overwhelming majority of Generation X, eighty seven and a half percent, strongly agreed or agreed with valuing paid time off over a cash bonus as a form of reward. One third of Generation Y, thirty three percent, were neutral on this question. The majority of Generation Y, fifty five percent, agreed they valued paid time off over cash bonuses. The overall grand median was participants agreed they valued paid time off over cash bonuses as forms of rewards. See Table 3.

**I view myself more of a contract employee (free agent) rather than a traditional full time employee.**

Half of the Mature respondents, fifty percent, disagreed with viewing themselves as a contract employee versus traditional full time employee, while twenty five percent of Matures were neutral. Fifty five percent of Boomers disagreed with this statement although thirty three percent of Boomers agreed with viewing themselves as contract employees. The clear majority of Generation X, eighty seven and a half percent, strongly disagreed or disagreed with this question. Sixty seven percent of Generation Y disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, although twenty two percent of the Y generation agreed with the question. The grand median response was that employees disagree with the notion of viewing themselves as contract employees. See Table 3.

**I would rather choose my own reward from a list of offerings rather than my boss selecting a reward for me.**

Sixty two and a half percent of Matures strongly agreed or agreed with choosing their own reward rather than leaving it up their boss. Twenty five percent of Matures were neutral on the question. The Boomer gave a firm endorsement of one hundred percent in favor of choosing their own rewards. Seventy five percent of Generation X strongly agreed or agreed to this statement while one quarter of Gen X were neutral. Finally, eighty nine percent of Generation Y affirmed this statement with a strongly agree or agree response. The overall grand median was that participants agreed they would rather choose their own reward from a list of offerings rather than allowing their boss to select the reward for them. See Table 3.

**RESULTS IN DIFFERENCE ABOUT CAREER DEVELOPMENT EXPECTATIONS**

There were five closed ended statements regarding expectations about career development to which participants responded how strongly they agreed or disagreed on a five-point Likert Scale.

**My definition of career development aligns more closely with a linear career path (promotion) versus a lateral career path (enrichment).**

Sixty two and a half percent of both Generation X and Matures strongly agreed or agreed with this statement; however over a third of Matures disagreed with the question, while only a quarter of Gen X disagreed with it. Seventy eight percent of Boomers agreed with the definition of career development aligning more closely with promotion versus enrichment. Sixty seven percent of Generation Y also strongly agreed or agreed

with the question, while twenty two percent of those surveyed were neutral. The grand median response for all participants surveyed was they agreed with the statement. See Table 4.

TABLE 4  
Career Development  
Number of Responses and Median

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Median
My definition of career development aligns more closely with a linear career path (promotion) versus a lateral career path (enrichment).	M=1 B=2 X=1 Y=1	M=4 B=5 X=4 Y=5	M=0 B=1 X=1 Y=2	M=3 B=0 X=2 Y=1	M=0 B=1 X=0 Y=0	M=Neutral B=Agree X=Agree Y=Agree
I expect my employer to initiate and provide career development skills for me.	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=3	M=2 B=3 X=2 Y=3	M=2 B=5 X=3 Y=1	M=4 B=1 X=1 Y=2	M=0 B=0 X=2 Y=0	M=Neutral B=Neutral X=Neutral Y=Agree
It is my responsibility to initiate and develop my own career skills.	M=2 B=3 X=3 Y=2	M=6 B=6 X=4 Y=6	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=1	M=0 B=0 X=1 Y=0	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=Agree B=Agree X=Agree Y=Agree
I would rather work for a company who offers higher than average market salary but no opportunities for career growth and development.	M=0 B=0 X=0 Y=0	M=0 B=0 X=1 Y=0	M=1 B=1 X=2 Y=1	M=6 B=5 X=3 Y=7	M=1 B=3 X=2 Y=1	M=Disagree B=Disagree X=Disagree Y=Disagree
I would rather work for a company who offers lower than average market salary but a high potential for career growth and development.	M=1 B=1 X=1 Y=3	M=1 B=5 X=2 Y=4	M=2 B=3 X=0 Y=1	M=4 B=0 X=4 Y=1	M=0 B=0 X=1 Y=0	M=Neutral B=Agree X=Disagree Y=Agree

M=Matures  
B=Baby Boomers  
X=Generation X  
Y=Generation Y

### **I expect my employer to initiate and provide career development skills for me.**

Half of Matures, fifty percent, disagreed with the expectation that employers should provide career development skills for employees, however twenty five percent of Matures agreed with the question. Fifty five percent of Boomers were neutral on this statement, although thirty three percent of the Boomer participant population agreed with the question. Thirty seven and a half percent of Generation X were neutral on this

question, while another thirty seven and a half percent of Gen Xers disagreed or strongly disagreed that employers should provide career development for employees. The majority of Generation Y, sixty seven percent, strongly agreed or agreed that employers should provide career development for employees. Only twenty two percent of Generation Y disagreed with the question. The overall median response was neutral. See Table 4.

**It is my responsibility to initiate and develop my own career skills.**

An affirmation of one hundred percent of Matures and Boomers strongly agreed or agreed to this question. Eighty seven and half of Generation X agreed it was their responsibility to initiate and develop their own career skills. The majority of Generation Y, eighty nine percent, also strongly agreed or agreed to the statement. The grand median response to this question was that participants agreed it is their own responsibility to develop their career skills. See Table 4.

**I would rather work for a company who offers higher than average market salary but no opportunities for career growth and development.**

Eighty seven and a half percent of Matures disagreed or strongly disagreed to this question. The majority of Boomers, eighty nine percent, also disagreed with the statement. Sixty two and half percent of Generation X disagreed or strongly disagreed with the question, however twenty five percent were neutral. Eighty nine percent of Generation Y disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. The grand median response was employees disagreed with wanting to work for a company who would offer a higher than average market salary but no opportunities for growth and advancement. See Table 4.

**I would rather work for a company who offers lower than average market salary but a high potential for career growth and development.**

Half of the Matures who responded, fifty percent, disagreed with the statement, although twenty five percent agreed or strongly agreed. The majority of Boomers, sixty seven percent, strongly agreed or agreed. Sixty two and a half percent of Generation X disagreed and stated they would not want to work for a company who offers lower than average market salary but a high potential for career growth. The clear majority of Generation Y, seventy eight percent, strongly agreed or agreed that would in fact want to work for a company who offers lower than average market salary in exchange for growth potential. The grand median response from employees who participated in the survey was that they agreed with the statement. See Table 4.

#### SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to determine if generational differences exist in employee work expectations. The population used in this study was a stratified random sampling of full time employees at Lord Fairfax Community College. There were 170 full-time employees including faculty, classified staff, and administrators at the college during the time of the study. A total of forty surveys were distributed, ten for each of the four generation in the workforce. Thirty-four surveys were returned for an 85 percent response rate.

There was wide consensus from participants to the first research section on expectations about working hard, taking initiative, and contributing to an organization. All generations ranked dependability as the most important item to demonstrate initiative, work hard, and contribute. The generations concurred that paying your dues and actual

hours worked had the least impact on initiative and contribution. There were marked differences among the four generations in their view of employee competition being healthy for an organizations' culture.

There was similar consensus from participants in their expectations on work and life balance. Most generations were aligned in their manner of responses with the exception of Generation X's response to devoting themselves to work at the expense of their own personal growth or family time.

Rewards and compensation proved to be another category where expectations among the four generations were closely aligned, with only slight differences noted among the four groups in most areas. The most marked difference detected was Generation X's view on valuing paid time off over a cash bonus as a form of reward.

Finally, the area of career development indicated slight differences in the expectations of the four generations surveyed. Generation Y separated itself from the other generations by stating it is the employer's responsibility to provide its employees with career development.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V presents a summary of this study. This chapter includes an analysis of the data presented and conclusions drawn. Finally, recommendations are made and areas for further research are proposed.

#### SUMMARY

The problem of the study was to determine differences in work expectations held by differing generations of American workers to prepare employers for future changes in employee retention, engagement, and recruitment. Goals included in this study were:

1. Are there generational differences in the beliefs about what it means to work hard, take initiative, or contribute to the organization?
2. Are there differences in the expectations of a work and life balance among the four generations of employees?
3. Do differences among generational cohorts exist in the expectations about compensation and rewards?
4. Does each generation take a different approach to career development? How do these approaches differ?

The population used in this study was a stratified random sampling of full-time employees at Lord Fairfax Community College. There were 170 full-time employees including faculty, classified staff, and administrators at the college during the time of the study. A total of forty surveys were distributed, ten for each of the four generation in the workforce. The survey was designed to query participants about their work expectations.

The survey contained closed-ended questions on work expectations based on the four research goals. After collecting the data, an analysis was performed. The conclusions and recommendations based on this analysis are discussed.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data collected, the following conclusions were drawn from the survey results.

### **Goal 1. Are there generational differences in the beliefs about what it means to work hard, take initiative, or contribute to the organization?**

All generations widely agreed they possess an entrepreneurial work spirit in the manner they approach their jobs. All generations also agreed they derive intrinsic reward from contributing at high levels to their organizations. The generations widely concurred their sense of job security was impacted by their own individual market value.

The generations did not agree that competition was healthy for their organizations' culture. Although the majority of Matures and Boomers agreed competition was healthy for the culture, Generation X was neutral and the majority of Generation Y disagreed. This data suggests the two younger generations have both mixed and negative perceptions about competition being healthy in the workplace. The generations also disagreed on job security being dependent on their companies' success. The Matures, Gen X, and Generation Y believe their security rests on company success, however the Boomers were neutral. This could be attributed to the Baby Boomers experiencing the largest mass corporate downsizing during the earliest part of their careers in the 1980's.

**Goal 2. Are there differences in the expectations of a work and life balance among the four generations of employees?**

Although the majority of all generations disagreed that they feel guilty when leaving work on time, one hundred percent of Generation X disagreed with feeling guilty about leaving on time. This sends a strong message about the line Generation X draws between work and life. The majority of Matures and Generation X felt neutral about taking vacation during a busy time at work; however the Boomers and Generation Y felt guilty when they took vacation during a busy time. Surprisingly, the majority of Boomers agreed they would not be interested in a promotion or raise if they would have to sacrifice more of their personal time. This response does not coincide to the information collected in the review of literature. Boomers were the generation who would put their careers ahead of their own personal lives in order to achieve career success. Another surprising conclusion was that Generation X was the only cohort who agreed they have devoted themselves to work at the expense of personal growth and family life. This could indicate that Gen X is hypersensitive to the demands of a career and consider any type of job sacrifice as infringement upon personal growth and family life.

**Goal 3. Do differences among generational cohorts exist in the expectations about compensation and rewards?**

All generations agreed company loyalty and longevity should be rewarded. The generations also concurred that employees should be paid more for doing more and paid more for knowing more. Most of the generations would value paid time off over a cash bonus as a form or reward; however the Matures were split in their response to this

question. The review of literature showed that Matures grew up learning a penny saved is a penny earned and they have only moderate expectations about compensation, and take greater pride in a sense of accomplishment. The majority of the generations did not view themselves as contract employees; however the Boomers showed interest in this concept. Over a third of the Baby Boomers agreed with viewing themselves as contract employees rather than traditional full-time employees. The review of literature suggested employers are overlooking the contributions of Boomers and instead attempting to engage generations X and Y. Perhaps this has caused Boomers to rethink their relationship with their employers. All generations agreed they would rather choose their own reward from a list of offerings rather than their boss selecting a reward for them. Generation X and Generation Y had a strong percentage of employees who strongly agreed with the question, suggesting this is a hot button for rewarding their performance.

**Goal 4. Does each generation take a different approach to career development?**

**How do these approaches differ?**

The Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y all agreed their career development aligns more closely with promotion versus enrichment; however a third of Matures disagreed with this view of career development. This could signal the Matures interest in new career areas, or possibly consulting, as opposed to traditional retirement. Generation Y was the only cohort to state they expect their employer to provide career development skills for them. Generation X was the only cohort who had a significant voice, thirty seven percent, to strongly disagree that employers should provide career development skills. All generations did agree that individuals are accountable for developing their own careers. All generations expressed they would rather not work for a

company who offers higher than average market salary but no opportunity for career growth. Both Matures and Generation X generations also said they would not want to work for a company with lower than average market salary but opportunity for growth and development.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted based on employee responses within a public higher educational facility. Employees who are drawn to work in a higher educational institution could have differences in employer expectations regarding the four research goals that were explored. The researcher would recommend that data be collected from private employers across multiple industries to compare the responses of the four employee generations.

Further studies should be conducted on understanding why differences exist on competition being healthy for an organization. The older two generations agreed competition in the workplace was healthy for an organization. Generation X was neutral and the majority of Generation Y disagreed that competition was healthy in the workplace. More studies could attempt to understand why the younger generations do not have a positive view on the impact of competition in organizations.

The data also suggested a strong difference between the X Generations and all other generations regarding a work and life balance. Generation X draws a distinct line between work life and career, however they also state that they have devoted themselves to work at the expense of personal growth or family life. I would recommend further

studies be conducted to understand these boundaries and identify ways for employers to offer programs that address this need.

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## APPENDIX A

## ***GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN WORK EXPECTATIONS***

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Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Your answers will be held confidential. Data will be reported as aggregate information; no individual responses will be disclosed. *Please check the most appropriate box for your work preferences. Thank you in advance for your participation!*

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Career Development</b>					
My definition of career development aligns more closely with a linear career path (promotion) versus a lateral career path (enrichment).					
I expect my employer to initiate and provide career development skills for me.					
It is my responsibility to initiate and develop my own career skills.					
I would rather work for a company who offers higher than average market salary but no opportunities for career growth and					
I would rather work for a company who offers lower than average market salary but a high potential for career growth and development.					
<b>Rewards and Compensation</b>					
Company loyalty and longevity should be rewarded.					
I should be paid more for doing more.					
I should be paid more for knowing more.					
I would value paid time off over a cash bonus as a form of reward.					
I view myself more of a contract employee (free agent) rather than a traditional full time employee.					
I would rather choose my own reward from a list of offerings rather than my boss selecting a reward for me.					
<b>Work and Life Balance</b>					
I feel guilty when I leave work on time.					
I feel guilty when I take vacation during a busy time.					

I would not be interested in a promotion or raise if I will have to sacrifice more of my personal time.					
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Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have devoted myself to work at the expense of my own personal growth or family life.					
Rank these items in the order they appeal to you		1 Highest – 5 Lowest			
		Telecommuting			
		Project-Based Work			
		Job Sharing			
		Child Care / Elder Care			
		Contributing to Leadership Decisions			
<b>Working Hard, Taking Initiative, and Contributing to an Organization</b>					
I possess an entrepreneurial work spirit in the way I approach my job.					
Competition among employees is healthy for an organizations culture.					
I feel intrinsically rewarded when I know I am contributing at a high level to my organization.					
My sense of job security is most highly impacted by my organizations success.					
My sense of job security is most highly impacted by my own market value.					
Rank these items in importance regarding beliefs about taking initiative, working hard, and contributing to an organization: (1 being		1 Highest – 5 Lowest			
		Actual Number of Hours Worked			
		Personal sacrifice for the benefit of the organization			
		Paying your dues			
		Getting it done at all costs			
		Dependability			

Thank you so much for contributing to the success of my research!

## APPENDIX B

October 17, 2006

Dear :

I am currently working on a research project as part of my Masters Degree in Occupational Education for Business and Industry Training at Old Dominion University. This research project identifies differences in work expectations held by differing generations of American workers to prepare employers for future changes in employee retention, engagement, and recruitment.

**Would you like a shot at a million dollars?** In exchange for your time in taking a few minutes to complete and return this instrument, I will present you with a Virginia Lotto ticket. Your answers will be held confidential. Data will be reported as aggregate information; no individual responses will be disclosed. Your participation in the study is voluntary. By completing this survey, you volunteer to participate. Please do not put your name on the survey. I have coded the survey, not for personal identification, but for follow-up and distribution of the lottery tickets.

Please seal your instrument in the provided envelop and return it to my Lord Fairfax Community College mailbox by October 20, 2006. Thank you so much for contributing to the success of my research!

Sincerely,

Jeanian Clark  
Workforce Solutions  
Lord Fairfax Community College  
540-868-7122, jclark@lfcc.edu