Changing Roles: Are Millennials Redefining The Balance Between Work And Life?

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Abstract

Generational differences in organizational citizenship and work-life balance were examined. Of the 543 survey respondents, 272 were Boomers, 171 were GenX’ers, and 89 were Millennials. Results showed Boomers and GenX’ers engaged in more individual initiative behavior than Millennials and generation interacted with individual initiative behavior to predict work-life imbalance.
Changing Roles: Are Millennials Redefining The Balance Between Work And Life?

Generational differences shaped by cultural events and changes may affect work values of different cohorts. One dramatic change over the past 50 years has been the steady increase in the number of women entering the workforce. Department of Labor statistics show that in 1950 women represented only 29% of the employed workforce while in 2008 they comprised almost 47%. As the participation of women in the workforce changed, work attitudes and values may have been molded by this intergenerational dynamic. The purpose of the present study was to assess generational differences with respect to two key work values—organizational citizenship behaviors and work-life balance. We contrasted both men’s and women’s attitudes regarding these issues across three generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X’ers, and Millennials.

Generational differences represent the set of values that people within the same age group possess. It is posited that these values are formed by a common history that is shared by a generational cohort including such major life events as wars, economic recessions, political upheaval, and both natural and industrial disasters. While these events have an effect on all generations, they have the most profound effect on the youngest generation (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002).

Generation Definitions

Baby Boomers

Baby Boomers are defined as people born between the years 1946 and 1960 (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). Major life events for this generation include the Vietnam War and the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Most Baby Boomers were raised by two parents and had a stay at home mother. Zemke et al. (2000) stated that the parents of this generation considered child rearing to be a symbol of what they had fought for through the depression and World War II rather than a biological necessity. The combination of the positive economic conditions due to
the post World War II boom, as well as attention and encouragement from parents, created an optimistic outlook among this generation (Zemke et al., 2000).

GenX'ers

GenX'ers, born between the years 1961 and 1980 (Zemke et al., 2000) were shaped by life events such as Watergate and the Challenger disaster. Although many X’ers were not born when Watergate occurred, the resulting loss of faith in the government shaped their formative years. This generation faced a tougher economy than the Baby Boomers and their family lives were not nearly as stable. A social imperative to succeed financially, combined with a tougher economy that made it difficult to live on just one salary, resulted in more dual career families. Because both parents worked, many GenX'ers became latchkey kids, developing a sense of self-reliance and a preference for freedom (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Kupperschmidt, 1998). GenX'ers learned early on that they needed to make their own opportunities and that achieving their goals may come at a price leading them to take a cynical outlook.

Millennials

Millennials born between the years 1981 and 2000 (Zemke et al., 2000) experienced the 9/11 disaster and the Iraq war. According to Zemke et al. (2000), Baby Boomer parents of this generation delayed childbearing to focus on their careers and so approached parenting with the same level of enthusiasm and drive to achieve that they had for their careers. GenX'er parents are dedicated to making sure that their children do not experience the neglect that they felt. Parents of Millennials (aka helicopter parents), take an active role in all areas of their lives, scheduling extra-curricular activities and advocating for them at college and jobs. Unlike their predecessors the GenX'ers, Millennials are the center of parental and societal attention (Zemke et al., 2000) and as a result have a more positive view of society and institutions (Murray, 1997).
Changes to the work-life balance equation

The health benefits of reducing stress through a balanced life, as well as the difficulty of achieving a balanced life, are well known (Quick et al., 2004). Fisher-McAuley, Stanton, Jolton, and Gavin (2003) describe work-life balance as a competition for both time and energy between the different roles filled by an individual. Someone's life can be considered unbalanced when the amount of time one works causes some sort of conflict or stress in other areas of life. Stress can also result from spillover from life to work and feelings of guilt about the choices being made (Quick et al., 2004).

Societal and technological changes since the 1950's have altered both sides of the work-life balance equation. These changes include the loss of traditional gender roles that defined who was responsible for managing the “life” half of the equation. Technological and economic changes have raised expectations of employees increasing the pressure on the “work” half of the equation.

Managing Life

During the 1940’s, and 1950’s, men managed work and women managed life. Women took care of not only the housework, but also the emotional work of running the family (Moen, 1998). This division of labor minimized the impact on the family when a father needed to increase his focus on work. If the children were ill or even if an elderly relative needed care, the work routine would not be disrupted (Moen, 1998).

Baby Boomers faced the most drastic changes in defining gender roles. As the Baby Boomers entered the workplace, the successful worker was male, was committed to a long-term position at a company, and did not let his personal life interfere with work (Moen, 1998). As Baby Boomer women entered the workplace, they tried to meet this standard. As the gender role
boundaries began to blur, the "life" part of the equation became difficult to manage, with a good deal of the responsibility for family and "life" falling on Baby Boomer women.

GenX'ers, the first generation of latchkey kids, grew up with an acceptance of women in the workplace. They saw their parents make sacrifices for work that were not always rewarded (Jurkiewicz, 2000). They came to view work as more of a means to an end and understood that they could not have it all without some sacrifices. They entered the work force expecting to have to face difficult choices with respect to work and life. This generation is less likely to put work at the center of their lives than the Baby Boomers and more likely to choose not to advance their careers when there is a negative trade-off with their personal life (American Business Collaboration, 2004).

Millennials are just joining the work force and therefore, have less experience balancing work and life than the older generations. Changes that have been stressful for Baby Boomers and GenX'ers are taken for granted by Millennials. Diversity in the workplace is expected. Women work and 50% of kids live in single parent families. These are not seen as unusual; rather they are seen as facts of life in today's society (Zemke et al., 2000).

Overall, it is expected that both gender and generation will influence perceptions of work-life balance.

Hypothesis 1: Gender and generation will interact together to influence perceptions of work-life balance.

Hypothesis 1a: Baby Boomers will report less work-life balance than GenX'ers or Millennials

Hypothesis 1b: Women will report more work-life imbalance than men.
Managing work expectations

One of the struggles with work-life balance is to maintain this balance while still being viewed as a “good employee”. Organ (1997) defined organizational citizenship behavior as “contributions to the maintenance and enhancement of the social and psychological context that support task performance” (p. 91). He further explained that these behaviors are not usually part of a formal job description nor do they have direct ties to a formal reward system. One type of organizational citizenship behavior includes individual initiative behaviors where employees focus on task related behaviors but at a level that “is so far beyond minimally required or generally expected levels that it takes on a voluntary flavor” (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000, p. 524). Examples of these behaviors for white collar workers include checking email from home, working during days off, and attending work related functions on personal time (Bolino & Turnley, 2005).

While the idea of going above and beyond expectations at work is not new, there have been changes in the workplace that have raised those expectations and removed some of the physical restrictions that limited employee initiative. In the 1990's, new technology (email, laptops, cell phones) became available that enabled employees to work from anywhere at anytime (Greenblatt, 2002; O'Toole & Lawler, 2006; Quick et al., 2004). With increased globalization, the definition of the work day is less clear. But with this new ability to expand where and when work gets done came the expectation that workers will work anytime, anywhere (O'Toole and Lawler, 2006).

What used to be considered above and beyond has now become expected with employees feeling pressure to exhibit more individual initiative behavior (Perlow, 1998). Bolino and Turnley (2005) posited that employees who exhibit more individual initiative behavior
would most likely have less time and energy for other aspects of their life, specifically their family. Their study found that there was a positive relationship between the amount of individual initiative behavior and work-family conflict, as well as job stress and role overload. Although these types of behaviors seem to contribute to work-life imbalance, companies continue to reward employees for these behaviors implicitly, if not formally (Werner, 1994).

**Generational differences with respect to individual initiative behaviors**

Each generation’s outlook on business and success may affect their behavior with respect to work-life balance. Due to the sheer number of Baby Boomers, they learned early that they need to stand out to be noticed and to succeed (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). This belief could certainly encourage them to not only engage in individual initiative behavior but to be vocal about those behaviors to ensure they got credit. Baby Boomers expect that they will be rewarded in the long run by going above and beyond expectations.

GenX'ers have been labeled the “slacker” generation that has no work ethic. Zemke et al. (2000) propose that GenX’ers actually have a different work ethic. They explain that GenX'ers are very willing to work hard, but tend to focus more on getting the job done rather than the time it takes to do the work. They value freedom and flexibility in the workplace (Zemke et al.; Jurkiewicz, 2000). Because GenX'ers are skeptical of promises of future rewards, they are less willing to engage in behaviors that do not have apparent and immediate rewards.

Zemke et al. (2000) compared Millennials to the Veteran generation that preceded the Baby Boomers. They said that this generation is more morally conservative and more willing to work for the common good. They are trusting of management. The blurred boundaries between work and life due to technology poses no difficulty for this generation. They are already “connected” before they reach the workplace (Giordani, 2005). With instant messaging, Twitter,
Facebook, iPods, etc. this generation takes technology for granted. They are not naive about the impact these technologies may have on their work-life balance and value work that they enjoy (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002).

We predict that Millennials and Baby Boomers will report more individual initiative behavior than GenX’ers because they have a more positive view of work. We expect that women may report engaging in less individual initiative behavior because they still manage more of the family responsibilities and have less opportunity to engage in these behaviors.

Hypothesis 2: Generation and gender will combine to influence individual initiative behavior.

Hypothesis 2a: Millennials and Baby Boomers will report more individual initiative behavior that GenX’ers.

Hypothesis 2b: Men will report more individual initiative behavior than women.

Work-life Balance Programs

Usage of work-life balance programs

In response to all of the attention from employees and the media, companies have begun to introduce many programs to help with work-life balance, such as, part-time work, job sharing, working from home, and allowing leave for education or family matters (De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott & Pettit, 2005). Although many companies offer some work-life balance programs, many of these benefits are not being used (Nord, Fox, Phoenix & Viano, 2002). While some of the reasons include, poor communication about program availability and improper implementation (De Cieri et al., 2005), other factors include fear of how participation will affect an employee’s career (Nord et al., 2002). De Cieri et al. found that in 50% of the companies surveyed in Australia, fewer than 20% of the employees participated in work-life balance programs. While providing vacation time is probably the most common work-life balance program, many
employees do not take full advantage of their vacation time. The Families and Work Institute (2005) found that while 79% of employees have paid vacation, 36% do not plan to take the full vacation time allotted to them.

Nord et al. (2002) interviewed employees of two consulting firms to understand some of the difficulties employees have with work-life balance programs, specifically, telecommuting and a reduced work schedule. Participants voiced concerns about the incompatibility of the programs with existing practices of assigning work and assessing performance; feelings of isolation while working at home; and lack of true support from their immediate manager. This last concern was experienced as subtle negative communication from managers and coworkers that reinforced the idea that participation in work-life balance programs was counter to the organizational culture. Because the generations vary in their levels of optimism and trust, we expect that there would be generational differences in perceptions about how much risk there is in using work-life balance programs.

Hypothesis 3: Baby Boomers will report less usage of work-life balance programs than Millennials and GenX’ers.

Hypothesis 4: Women will report more usage of work-life balance programs than men, regardless of generation.

Hypothesis 5: Baby Boomers and GenX’ers will report more perceived risk of using one of these programs than Millennials.

METHOD

Participants

This study surveyed the alumni population from medium sized public university in the Northeast. This study focused exclusively on people born and raised in the United States. The
major events and the social and economic trends that influence the values for each of these
generations are those that are specifically relevant to the United States. There were 543
participants: 50% Baby Boomers, 32% GenX'ers and 16% Millennials. The participants were
primarily Caucasian (89.1%). The Baby Boomer cohort had the largest percentage of Caucasian
participants (93.9%) and the Millennial cohort the lowest (80.6%). More women (68.6%)
responded to the survey than men (31.2%). The Baby Boomer group had the highest proportion
of men (34.4%), followed by the GenX'ers (29.9%), and then the Millennial cohort (25.4%). The
majority of participants held only one job (79%). Baby Boomers were significantly ($X^2(2)=
9.29, p=.01$) more likely to hold only one job (85.4%) than GenX'ers (75.6%) and Millennials
(70.8%). The majority of participants reported having at least one child (76.8%). Baby Boomers
(91.2%) were more likely to have children than GenX'ers (74.6%) and Millennials (40.3%). As
expected, the Baby Boomers had more children older than 24 (47.5%) compared to GenX'ers
(4.9%) and Millennials (0%). While GenX'ers (46.1%) were most likely to have children under
4 compared to Baby Boomers (10.4%) and Millennials (36.8%).

**Procedures**

A paper and pencil survey was mailed to all potential participants. This method was
chosen over a web-based survey so as not to skew the results to younger more technologically
adept individuals. Participants were asked to fill out the survey and return it by mail.

**Measures**

The survey included measures of work-life balance, work-life program usage and
perceived risk, and individual initiative behavior as well as demographic information. The
demographic questions asked about age, gender, country of origin and current employment
status. Age was used to determine in which generational cohort the participant was placed.
Work-life balance was measured by the Work Interference with Personal Life (WIPL) scale developed by Fisher-McAuley et al. (2003). Cronbach alpha for this scale was \( \alpha = .91 \). This scale was chosen because it was relevant for participants who do not have family responsibilities but still may experience work impinging on their personal life. This scale assessed whether participants currently felt they had a balance between work and life. This scale contained 7 items and participants responded using a 5 point Likert scale. Scores ranged from 7 – 35 with a higher score signifying less balance.

Individual initiative behavior was measured by a scale designed by Bolino and Turnley. Participants responded as to how often they engaged in these behaviors using a 5 point Likert scale. Scores ranged from 15 – 75 with the higher scores signifying more frequent engagement. The Cronbach alpha was \( \alpha = .91 \).

Participants’ usage of work-life programs and their view of the risks inherent in each program were measured by a scale created by the researchers. The questions concerning work-life balance programs asked participants about 12 specific programs mentioned in the literature discussing work-life programs (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007; Kirby and Krone 2002; Allen, 2001; DeCiera et al., 2005). For each program, the participant was asked to state whether their current employer provided this program; their perception of the risk involved in using the program; and the likelihood that they would use this program at some point in their career. Participants did not complete all of the questions for all of the programs listed. They only answered the questions about risk and likely use for those programs that were offered by their current employer. Scores for the risk and usage associated with work-life balance programs were calculated by adding up the individual scores and dividing by the number of questions that were answered.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Work-life Balance

To test Hypothesis 1, a 2 x 2 ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in perceived work-life balance across generations by gender. Results showed that generation and gender significantly interacted to predict how much work-life imbalance individuals experienced (F(2, 488) = 3.54, p = .03). For Baby Boomers, men experienced the least work-life imbalance ($M = 19.47$), while women experienced the most ($M = 21.60$). For Millennials, the pattern was completely reversed. Women experienced the least work-life imbalance ($M = 18.57$), while men ($M = 21.39$) experienced the most. The finding for Baby Boomers is what one would expect based on gender differences found in past research. Women experience more work-life imbalance than men. The differences found for the Millennials revealed a different pattern. Millennial men experienced greater work-life imbalance while Millennial women experienced less. Perhaps Millennial men have experienced increased pressure to contribute to the care of young children and to household maintenance and find these demands conflict with those of their job. While the current study cannot answer this question, the results suggest a shift in generational experiences that future research should address. Due to this cross-over interaction, the Hypotheses 1a and 1b were not supported. The main effects for generation (F(2, 488) = .65, p = .52) and for gender (F(1, 488) = .30, p = .59) were not significant. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior

A 2 x 2 ANOVA was conducted to test Hypothesis 2 and determine if generation and gender interacted significantly to predict individual initiative behavior. The interaction was not significant (F(2, 488) = 1.96, p = .14). The main effect for generation was significant (F(2, 488) = 4.23, p = .02), while the main effect for gender was not (F(1, 488) = .01, p = .91). The results
did not support hypothesis 2b that stated that women would report less individual initiative behavior than men. Hypothesis 2a was also not supported. The results showed that Baby Boomers ($M = 39.09$) and Gen X’ers ($M = 38.26$) engaged in significantly more individual initiative behavior than Millennials ($M = 34.52$).

Interestingly, generation significantly interacted with organizational citizenship behavior to predict work-life imbalance ($F(2, 494) = 5.92, p = .003$) indicating that the relation between work-life imbalance and organizational citizenship behavior depended on which generation you were examining. The correlation between work-life balance and organizational citizenship behavior was lower for Millennials ($r(72) = .30, p = .01$) than for the Baby Boomers ($r(215) = .48, p = .000$). The Boomers, not only engaged in more organizational citizenship behaviors, but the amount of citizenship behavior they engaged in predicted how much perceived work-life imbalance there was in their lives. This suggests that their work-life imbalance was mainly due to demands from work. Millennials, on the other hand, engaged in fewer individual initiative behaviors and the extent to which they engaged in these behaviors was less likely to predict their work-life imbalance.

Work-life Balance Programs

The most common programs that were provided to the participants of this study included unpaid family medical leave (58.2% of participants), paid maternity leave (52.4% of participants) and part-time work (52% of participants). The least provided programs included job sharing (13.4% of participants), brief (1 – 2 months) paid sabbatical (13.4% of participants) and work from home all the time (9.8% of participants). Table 3 shows the results for all or the programs and the comparison between generations.
Perceived Risk

Hypothesis 5 stated that Baby Boomers and GenX’ers would report more perceived risk to using one of these programs than Millennials. The results of this study do not support that hypothesis because Millennials reported the highest level of perceived risk (see Table 4) and Baby Boomers reported the least amount of risk. A one way ANOVA was conducted to determine if the mean of these values were significantly different between generational groups. The results of this analysis show that the main effect of generation approached significance $F(2, 411) = 2.81, p = .06$.

Work-Life Program Usage

Hypothesis 3a stated that Baby Boomers would report less usage of work-life balance programs than Millennials and GenX’ers. The results indicated a significant main effect for generation ($F(2, 464) = 10.73, p = .000$). Baby Boomers ($M = 2.68$) in this study reported significantly less usage of work-life balanced programs than both GenX’ers ($M = 3.02$) and Millennials ($M = 3.24$). GenX'ers and Millennials were approximately equal.

Hypothesis 3b stated that women would report more usage of work-life balance programs than men, regardless of generation. An independent samples t-test was conducted to see if there was a significant difference between likely usage for men and women. This analysis found a significant difference between the two group $t (468) = -2.96, p = .00)$. Women ($M = 3.06$) reported that they were more likely to use the available work-life programs than men ($M = 2.76$) (see Table 6).

Work life balance is often perceived as a “women’s issue. O’Toole and Lawler (2006) stated that work life balance is associated with women because it became a more prominent issue
when women began entering the workforce in larger numbers. The level of work life imbalance was not significantly different for men or women overall when generation was not considered. This suggests that the work life issues for men and women are more complicated and need to be examined along with other factors such as age or generation.

The results of this study did however show that women across the generations are more willing to take advantage of the work life balance programs that are offered. One argument may be that the programs, having potentially been designed for women, are not as applicable to men. That was accounted for in this study by allowing participants to state which programs were not applicable to them and by calculating their score based only on applicable programs. Therefore, women appear to be more willing to take advantage of programs that are offered to help create a better balance in their lives. This indicates a need for a focus on the reluctance men have to use the work life balance programs that are offered. It is interesting to note that despite the fact that women claim to take more advantage of work life balance programs, they do not consistently report better work life balance than men. It is not clear from this study if the programs are not helpful or if without the option to use these, women’s work-life balance would be worse.

Another possible explanation for the generational differences found in this study is that they have more to do with age than with generational cohorts. Members of the same generational cohort may also be at similar life stages with similar familial responsibilities. This could also be an explanation for generational differences rather than a common set of experiences during childhood. Familial responsibilities include, raising children, caring for aging parents, and whether or not a person has a spouse or partner with whom to share those responsibilities. This study did not specifically look at the relationship between these factors and work life balance. There are, however some interesting characteristics of this sample that are
worth mentioning. The Baby Boomers in this sample reported the least work life balance of the three generations but that cohort was also the most likely to be married (70%) and the least likely to have children under the age of 4 (15%). This suggests an opportunity for additional research that looks at both familial responsibility and generational differences as factors relating to work life balance.

What can be concluded from these results with respect to the importance of work life balance in the lives of these three generations? These differences in both behaviors and perceptions indicate that it is important to not only consider gender differences in work-life balance, but that generational differences must also be considered.
REFERENCES


Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Work-life Balance Scores by Generation and Gender*

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<td>SD</td>
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Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for Individual Initiative Behaviors by Generation and Gender*

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<td>38.35</td>
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Table 3

Participants reports on the Availability of Work-life Balance Programs by Generation

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<th>Total %</th>
<th>Baby Boomers %</th>
<th>GenX'ers %</th>
<th>Millennials %</th>
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Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Risk of Work-life Balance Programs by Generation*

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Table 5

*Descriptive Statistics for Work-life Balance Program Usage by Generation*

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</table>
Table 6

*Descriptive Statistics for Usage of Work-life Balance Programs by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>