

Managing Generational Differences in the Sport Industry: Perspectives from the Front Office

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Abstract

The sporting industry is a billion-dollar industry that has a ginormous amount of money injected into it annually. Three different generations currently make up around 92% of the workforce of the Sport Industry, which includes The Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. The purpose of this study is to find how the sport industry can create an organizational culture that embraces and supports the attitudes of a multigenerational workforce.

Introduction

“The sport industry is a culture of its own. Americans love sports” (Brubaker & Austin, 1992). It would be safe to assume then when one is to contemplate the part a leader would play in this industry; a player and a coach of a professional organization would come to mind. The idea set forth here is to shift from thinking merely of the players and coaches of an organization to thinking about the nucleus of the organization: the administrative staff. *“Administrators who work in the sport industry have key roles by overseeing, organizing, and planning sports and fitness activities”* (Heitzmann, 2004). It is imperative that the sport industry understands the impact that the three generations have with their differentiating attitudes. *“Understanding the generation gap and attitudes in the workforce includes understanding generational differences with a desire to strengthen work relationships among employees”* (Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, & Brown, 2007).

Throughout history, demographic patterns have been used to form new generations of employees; each group has its own set of values and characteristics that define its time period (Cordiner, 2001). For the purpose of this research, three generations will be considered: the Baby Boomer Generation (those born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (those born between 1965 and 1981), and Generation Y (those born between 1982 and 2000; Kupperschmidt, 2000).

The future success of employees, supervisors, and organizations will be directly affected by how they handle the blending of generational differences in the work force and their attitudes toward the work environment (Broderick, 1998; Deal, 2007). *“It is critical for organizations to understand generational differences in order to strengthen attitudes and relationships among employees”* (Deal, 2007; Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, & Mainiero, 2009).

In discussing attitudes in the workforce, three very different generations are working together. Each has different ideas about “work ethics” and their views of work (Downing, 2006; Lovely, 2008; Sessa et al., 2007). The Baby Boomer Generation feels it is their duty to work and be valued in the work place while remaining loyal to their job. Generation X sees learning in the workforce as a way of becoming more marketable for their next job. Finally, Generation Y is “both feedback orientated, and team orientated asking peers for their opinions when faced with a problem” (Downing, 2006, p. 6).

There is conflict in the workforce among employees of the Baby Boomer Generation, Generation X, and Generation Y (Nelson & Cowan, 1994). These three generations make up nearly 92% of the current workforce (U.S. Department of Labor, 2007). Along with each generation contributing to the workforce, there has been a noteworthy shift in the workforce. Leadership responsibilities are no longer the responsibility of the hierarchy of age. The old are not leading the young, but oftentimes an individual from Generation X or Generation Y might be higher in the hierarchy than someone who is old enough to be their parent (Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008). The complexity of the workforce has shifted and employees and employers must be aware of the generational gap in their organization in order to manage it (Downing, 2006).

“Understanding the differences between three generations, the Baby Boomer Generation (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1981), and Generation Y (1982–2000), is significant for the success of the workforce” (Deal, 2007; Lovely, 2008). Having different generations working together creates conflict in the workforce (Sullivan et al., 2009). The impact is negative because it decreases the efficiency of a team environment and does not promote a cohesive, efficient workforce. To solve the problems of inefficiency and miscommunication fostered by the generation gap, leaders in the workforce must understand these differences between the members of the Baby Boomer Generation, Generation X, and Generation Y and know how to cope with these differences (Deal, 2007; Winchell, 2007).

This descriptive study looked to establish and provide leaders and managers in the sport industry with information on the attitudes and preferences of different generations. The information can provide managers and leaders with ways to anticipate, evaluate, and resolve organizational issues that arise between generations because of generational differences. Having an understanding of the attitudes and preferences of coworkers and subordinates will promote a more cohesive, cooperative, and productive working environment (Deal, 2007). The following information will provide definitions of each generation established for this study.

Baby Boomer Generation (Boomer): Comprise of people who are born between the years of 1946 and 1964 or after WWII, and raised in an era of opportunity and growth.

Cohort: People born during the same general time frame who have experienced similar life experiences. A set of individuals who transition through life at the same time, who share birth years and experiences as they progress through stages of life.

Generation X (X'ers, Nexters, Generation X'ers, Slacker Generation): People born between 1965 and 1981, the smallest generation, comprising 16% of the U.S. population.

Generation Y (Y'ers, Gen Y): People born between 1982 and 2000, comprised of nearly 78 million members, influenced by the development of technology.

The issues pertaining to this study require several models to research. This researcher concluded that a descriptive mixed-methods approach was the best design. Mixed-methods research entails collecting both qualitative and quantitative data in the same study (Creswell, 2003). Quantitative studies are instrument-based and result in analyzing statistical data, while qualitative studies are open-ended, producing written data. A mixed-methods approach is used when the researcher feels that neither quantitative nor qualitative alone would offer sufficient penetration or insight into the study (Creswell, 2003). The small number of subjects limits this to a descriptive study.

A mixed-methods research study was applied to establish generational differences in attitudes toward work-related issues. A survey asked individuals working in the sport management industry questions pertaining to their attitudes toward retirement, technology, diversity, formality, and loyalty, which were the quantitative components of the study. The qualitative component was addressed by the final two questions and was geared toward how to enhance communication in the workplace. Understanding the existing generational differences, values, attitudes, and preferences that accompany each generation provides essential information that managers and leaders can use when anticipating, evaluating, and resolving issues in the workforce.

Literature Review

“The Baby Boomer Generation, Generation X, and Generation Y currently make up 92% of the workforce” (U.S. Department of Labor, 2007). Each of these groups have different stereotypes, beliefs, and interests that affect how they interact in the workforce. For the intent and purpose of this research, the researcher closely queried attitudes among the Baby Boomer Generation, Generation X, and Generation Y in the workforce. Focus was on the sport-management industry.

In the literature review, problems and rationales for attitudes in the workforce were explored. To understand the issues surrounding the generation gap, one must first understand the three generational groups that were the focus of this study.

Defining a Generation

“Generations are defined by people of the same age in a similar social location experiencing similar social events” (Sessa et al., 2007; Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008). Generations cannot be labeled with exact years because some like tendencies coincide across generational borders. However, it is common to gather views, values, and behavior in the definition of a generation to yield a general sense about the individuals in that generation. Understanding the shared experiences of the cohort and their visible behaviors and attitudes can be ways to differentiate generations (Timmerman, 2007; Wong et al., 2008). Additionally, it can be said that a generation is a group of people, or cohort, who share birth years and experiences as they progress through stages of life. Influences and experiences will shape generational beliefs. These factors may include shifts in society-wide attitudes; changes in social, economic, and public policy, and major events such as war or corporate downsizing (Wong et al., 2008, p. 879).

Currently, there are a total of six generations that make up the U.S. population: the Greatest Generation (1901–1925), the Silent Generation (1926–1945), the Baby Boomer Generation (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1981), Generation Y (1982–2000), and Generation Z (2001–present). For the purposes of this research, three generations will be explored; the Baby Boomer Generation (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1981), and Generation Y (1982–2000), which are the majority of the U.S. workforce (Sessa et al., 2007).

Baby Boomer Generation

The Baby Boomer Generation is made up of individuals born between 1946 and 1964, or those who were born shortly after the Second World War (Bennett & Lachowetz, 2004; Cordiner, 2001; Powell, 1999; Sessa et al., 2007). This generation is stereotypically associated with memorable events such as the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr., the first man to walk on the moon, the civil rights movement, antiwar protests, the sexual revolution, and Woodstock (Adams, 2000; Schuman & Scott, 1989). The Baby Boomer Generation makes up over 28% of the United States population, the largest population segment in existence today (Bennett & Lachowetz, 2004).

Many people in the Baby Boomer Generation resisted the use of technology in their everyday lives. These individuals may be considered a part of the “generation in digital denial” (Joseph & Stone, 2005, p. 74). This generation did not grow up with computers or electronic gadgets. Cellular phones, e-mail, the Internet, and wireless capabilities have only been part of their lives for the past 20 years. They would rather meet someone face-to-face (Rosen, 2004; Stein & Berardinelli, 2009), preferring in-person communication (Fletcher et al., 2009).

Generation X

Generation X, also known as Generation “Xers” were born between 1960 and the early 1980s (Cordiner, 2001). This generation makes up only 16% of the United States population (Bennett & Lachowetz, 2004). Generation X has been labeled by some as the “slacker” generation; however this term should be reconsidered in terms of education. Generation X is considered to be the best-educated generation in history (Reynolds, 2009; Weisman, 2004). According to the Current Population Survey, 30% of the Gen X population has college degrees (Reynolds, 2009). Although Generation X may be considered the best-educated generation, this group has a different mentality toward education than the Baby Boomers. Generation X sees college as debt accrument and “student loans are huge issues for Xers who are in college” (Wilson, 1998, p. 16).

Generation Y

Generation Y is defined as today's teenaged persons. Individuals born after 1978 and through the early 1990s fall into this category and Generation Y is nearly three times larger than Generation X (Bennett, Sagas, & Dees, 2006). This generation makes up a quarter of the United States population with roughly 78 million members (Bennett et al., 2006, p. 40) and is described as the digital generation (Bradish, Lathrop, & Sedgwick, 2001). Generation Y members have been influenced by technological advances, such as cell phones, automatic-teller machines, podcasting, and wireless capabilities. Events that have influenced Generation Y include the inauguration of the first African American president and the September 11th terrorist attacks (Timmerman, 2007).

For the purpose of this study, examination of the sport industry must be explored to understand generational differences in attitude in the workforce. Educational institutions that offer sport degrees were explored. Jobs and careers in sport management were considered as an integral part of this research.

Currently, most positions in the sport industry are filled by members of the Baby Boomer Generation, Generation X, and the newest employees of the sport industry, Generation Y. Positions vary in each organization and level of organization. There are dozens of front-office employees required for any professional or amateur team, and for every league or association involved in the sports industry. It has been estimated that for every player on a big-league team, there are a total of 10 individuals working in the front office of the organization (Helitzer, 1999). Sports executive recruiter, Mark Tudi, estimated that worldwide "there are 4.5 million sports jobs covering five major assignments: marketing (1.15 million), ownership (1.15 million), administration (500 thousand), representation (370 thousand) and media (300 thousand)" (as cited in Helitzer, 1999, p. 9).

Little information has been found pertaining to the intergenerational workforce in the sport-management industry. A mixed-method design was conducted to address the following research questions:

Question 1: What attitudes and preferences are similar in different generations working in the sport industry?

Question 2: What attitudes and preferences are different between generations working in the sport industry?

Question 3: What efforts are taking place in the sport industry to close the generation gap?

Data Collection

The study questions were distributed via e-mail to approximately 600 sport-administration alumni of a small Catholic University located in the southeast region of the United States. Each participant is part of a designated generational cohort: the Baby Boomer Generation (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1981), and Generation Y (1982–2000). Each participant was asked their year of birth, which in return linked them to a designated generational cohort.

A total of 46 questions were asked of participants. Eight questions pertained to demographic information, while a total of 36 questions used a 5-point Likert scale that focused on the exploration of differences between generational attitudes toward work in the sport industry. These attitudes cover the scope of retirement, technology, diversity, formality, and loyalty of each generational cohort. Two open-ended questions provided a qualitative component to the research. The questions for the qualitative component focus on communication in the workplace.

Currently, there are approximately 600 sport administration graduates who span between the following generational cohorts: the Baby Boomer Generation, 1946–1964; Generation X, 1965–1981; and Generation Y, 1982–2000. The intent was for a response rate of 75–100 surveys to be completed from each generational cohort. For there to be a confidence level of 95% and confidence interval of 4, a total of 67 surveys must have been received from each generational cohort. Because the sport-administration program started in the 1970s, all of the target participants fall into one of the generational cohorts: Baby Boomer Generation, 1946–1964; Generation X, 1965–1981; and Generation Y, 1982–2000.

Method of Data Analysis

Frequencies of responses were tabulated based on the survey questions. The mean, standard deviation, and median were calculated and analyzed with a 5-point Likert scale. Strongly Agree was considered 5, Agree was 4, Neutral was 3, Disagree was 2, and Strongly Disagree was considered 1. For single questions, to establish if any differences exist among generational cohorts, a Kruskal–Wallis test for the one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed because it is more robust to the potential nonnormality than the *F* test.

To address Research Questions 1 and 2, a .05 cutoff was applied to the obtained p value. This procedure roughly divided the attitude and performance questions into two parts: those statistically significant ($p < .05$) and those not. Note that this cutoff was selected without any multiple comparison adjustment because the study is not a confirmative experiment. These p values were calculated according to the following hypothesis:

H0: the median scores of generational cohorts are the same for question i ($i = 1, 2, \dots, 36$)

H1: at least one of them is different;

The sum of these questions was also calculated and the Tukey's method for simultaneous pair-wise comparison was implemented.

Participants were asked two open-ended questions; there were 68 respondents. Responses were analyzed and commonalities or trends established. The qualitative questions were analyzed through categorization and comparison of major themes that emerged after reading the results from the open-ended questions on the survey. Themes were compared to one another and some specific examples and quotations were provided to substantiate major themes. Some participants' comments were included to support analysis or show the development of major themes.

The researcher analyzed the qualitative questions through categorization and comparison of major themes that emerged after reading the results from the open-ended questions on the survey. Themes were compared to one another and some specific examples and quotations provided emphasis for major themes. Participants' comments have been included to support analysis or show the development of major themes.

Results and Data Analysis

This study focused on the generation gap in the workplace, specifically in the sports industry, comparing the Baby Boomer Generation (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1981), and Generation Y (1982–2000) employees. As previously mentioned on methodology, both qualitative and quantitative components were used.

The total number of respondents was 110. The Cronbach's α is 0.78 (raw) or 0.79 (standardized), which suggests a fairly high internal consistency of the instruments. The data regarding the gender of respondents is presented in

Table 1.

Table 2 presents the data of respondents' generational cohort and distribution of subjects' age categorized in cohort groups.

Table 3 presents the data of respondents' highest level of education. The Baby Boomer Generation cohort had 5 respondents with a doctoral degree, whereas the Generation X cohort had 6 with a doctoral degree and Generation Y had 2 with a doctoral degree.

Table 4 presents the data of respondents' sport environment that best describes the organization where they are employed. Note that the highest number of respondents work in a collegiate environment.

Table 5 presents the data of respondents' organizational level that best describes their position in the sport organization they work for. More than two thirds of respondents work in middle-management and upper-management positions.

Research Question 1: What attitudes and preferences are similar in different generations working in the sport industry?

Table 6 presents respondents' responses based on the 5-point Likert Scale. The questions were ranked according to their p values, which were generated by Kruskal-Wallis test. These p values are all above .05, indicating that the Baby Boomer Generation, Generation X, and Generation Y had no significant differences in their responses.

Research Question 2: What attitudes and preferences differ between generations working in the sport industry?

Table 7 listed the questions that have statistically significant differences among the three cohorts.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Sixty-eight participants responded to the open-ended questions on the survey. Responses were analyzed and commonalities or trends were established. For the qualitative questions, the researcher analyzed, through categorization and comparison of major themes that emerged, after reading the results from the open-ended questions on the survey. Themes were compared to one another and some specific examples and quotations are provided as emphasis for the major themes.

Two open-ended questions were asked to clarify efforts in the workplace to bridge the generation gap. The first open-ended question asked participants, “What does your supervisor do to bridge the generation gap in the workplace?” The second question was “What do you do to bridge the generation gap in the workplace?”

Research Question 3: What efforts are taking place in the sport industry to close the generation gap?

Two open-ended questions were included in this survey to address this research question. Both questions sought to establish what efforts are taking place in the sport industry to close the generation gap. The first question, “What does your supervisor do to bridge the generation gap in the workplace?” and the second question, “What do you do to bridge the generation gap in the workplace?” distinguish efforts taking place in the workplace to bridge the generation gap. Commonalities and emerging themes of participants in their generational cohort were established and compared. Each generation was explored and statements and respondents responses from participants are acknowledged in this section.

Survey Question #45—“What does your supervisor do to bridge the generation gap in the workplace?”

Baby boomer cohort. A total of 10 members from the Baby Boomer Generation responded to the question “What does your supervisor do to bridge the generation gap in the workplace?” There were no commonalities between the responses of this group. Responses ranged from “nothing at all” to “they treat everyone equally.” A male respondent, who is associated with a professional sports team, holds an executive position, and identified himself as General Manager/Executive Director, stated that their supervisor “offers opportunity to listen to my point of view.” In contrast to this statement, another male respondent, in middle management and self-identified as Director of Public Relations, responded that his supervisor does “unfortunately nothing” to bridge the generation gap in the workforce.

Generation X cohort. The generational cohort that had the most responses was Generation X (1965–1981) with 53 responses to the question “What does your supervisor do to bridge the generation gap in the workforce?” Emerging themes did exist between responses. A total of 12 respondents stated that nothing is done by their supervisor to bridge the generation gap.

One respondent who holds a masters degree, has an entry level position in a professional organization, and whose job title is Communications Coordinator, stated “not much to be honest. My supervisor is constantly pointing out how much experience and how many years of experience they have over me.” Another respondent, an executive in an amateur/recreational setting and whose job title is Leisure Services Director, stated that his supervisor does “nothing formal” to bridge the generation gap in the workplace.

A total of 11 respondents from Generation X indicated that, in their organization, communication is what assists in bridging the leadership gap. An Assistant Director of Academic and Membership Affairs, who holds a master’s degree and works as a middle manager in the collegiate environment, stated,

Our environment is one which actually uses the different perspectives of its employees as an advantage rather than noting it is a gap. Various perspectives are always solicited and taken into account. As a result, more informed, sensitive, appropriate decisions can be made.

Additional responses indicating that communication was a factor in bridging the generation gap were clear.

A response by a male who is the Director/Ticket Sales and Services who works in the collegiate environment and is considered to hold an upper-management position, stated that “we hold weekly staff meeting to discuss all issues and topics facing the organization. They take the time to make sure all employees understand the goals and objectives of the organization.”

Another recurring theme for Generation X was that supervisors put forth team-building activities to bridge the communication gap.

A total of 4 respondents indicated that their supervisors emphasize team work in their organization. One respondent, a female who holds a master's degree and works as a Project Manager for a professional organization, stated that her supervisor often has "team building activities and project alignment meetings." Another female respondent who is the Director of Athletics for a college athletics program and holds a position in upper management stated that her supervisor "encourages working relationships with small gatherings and team building assignments."

Generation Y cohort. Generation Y had four responses to the question "What does your supervisor do to bridge the generation gap in the workplace?" One respondent, a Community Affairs Coordinator, holding a middle-management position in a professional-sport organization, stated that he and his supervisor have "common goals and interests" that bridge the generation gap in his workplace.

A second respondent from Generation Y said that their supervisor "makes sure that everyone is on the same page at all times. Not one person in my group of colleagues is treated or trained better than the other." This statement was from a male working for a professional organization with an entry level position; his job title is Guest Services Representative.

Another comment from a Generation Y respondent, a Coordinator of Premium Seating, also working in the professional sport environment in an entry level position, indicated, they "try as a team to come up with different ideas or concepts that everyone can agree upon." She continued by stating that their "workplace consists of a generation gap of about 10–12 years being the max between supervisors and employees."

The final respondent from Generation Y stated that her supervisor makes it clear to all employees that their job is their main priority and that should be their main focus. The respondent, a Compliance Intern working in the collegiate sport environment, also stated that his supervisor "tries to create an environment that allows everyone to feel comfortable being themselves."

Survey Question #46—"What do you do to bridge the generation gap in the workplace?"

Baby boomer cohort. A second open-ended question was asked, with a total of 53 respondents providing responses to the question "What do you do to bridge the generation gap in the workplace?" An emerging theme for the Baby Boomer Generation was communication. There were 3 respondents who stated that they used communication as a way to bridge the generation gap in the workforce. A Head Coach working in a collegiate sport setting simply responded "communication." Additionally, a male who is currently an Associate Athletic Director in the collegiate sport environment explained that he "communicates well" and has "healthy working relationships with co-workers." Beyond the response of communication from the Baby Boomer Generation, there were no other trends that emerged from responses.

Generation X cohort. Generation X had a number of trends and commonalities emerge when asked "What do you do to bridge the generation gap in the workplace?" The top response, like that of the Baby Boomer Generation, stated that communication was a way they bridge this gap. A total of 11 respondents included the importance of communication in their response.

A male Associate Athletic Director at the college level stated that he "communicates as much as possible." A male, who holds a master's degree and is currently the Director of Team Travel in the professional sport environment stated that he communicates by "asking for others' advice and seeks others' knowledge." His goal is to "make everyone feel they have importance to the organization."

Additionally, 1 respondent, a female who holds a doctoral degree and is currently working as a Manager of Special Events at the collegiate level, stated that she communicates to her staff by "having the junior members participate in meetings with senior members to share thoughts and ideas," adding that she tries to "share experiences with junior members of the staff without stifling their creativity."

Respect was another trend and commonality that emerged in Generation X responses. Nine respondents indicated that they bridge the generation gap in the workplace by showing respect for all coworkers. A Project Manager, working in the professional sport environment, indicated that he "works hand in hand with everyone and treats everybody with respect." A second member of Generation X, who is the General Manager of a professional organization and holds an executive level position stated that he "tries to get to know employees," and said that he "respects all employees."

The final commonality or trend that emerged from the Generation X cohort was being able to “listen” to coworkers. A total of 6 respondents indicated that they listen to coworkers to help bridge the generations in the workforce. A female, who is the Director of Athletics at a college, indicated that she “listens” and “pays attention and learns” to bridge the generation gap in her workplace.

Two female respondents with master’s degrees, working in the collegiate environment, stated that they “listen to various ideas from all members of the staff.” Similarly stated, another female who has a master’s degree and works in an upper-management position for the collegiate environment as a Program Director stated, “I like to think I am a peace maker so I listen to everyone’s side and explain why they are right but why the other person is also right.”

Generation Y cohort. Generation Y had 4 respondents to the question “What do you do to bridge the generation gap in the workplace?” There was a commonality between the responses of this group. Responses ranged from learning from coworkers to listening to other employees. However, of the responses, the trend that was established was to listen. A male who has a master’s degree and holds an entry level position in a professional-sport organization stated that, as a Guest Services Representative, the way he bridges the generation gap is to “learn from people that have more or less experience than me. The more I listen to co-workers, the more I know in the long run.”

Another comment that coincides with the trend from this generational cohort was from a Generation Y member working in an entry-level position at a professional-sport organization and has the job title of Coordinator, Premium Seating. This person stated that she “tries to listen to other employees” to bridge the gap in the workforce.”

Summary

Each open-ended question asked to participants sought to provide trends and commonalities with each generational cohort. Both questions sought to establish how their supervisor worked to bridge the generation gap and how they try to bridge the generation gap in the workplace. Some themes and commonalities emerged for each generational cohort. The first question, “What does your supervisor do to bridge the generation gap?” established that the Baby Boomer Generation had no recurring themes.

Generation X had a few commonalities that included that their supervisors “aren’t doing anything to bridge the gap.” In contrast, Generation X had a few themes that stated that their supervisor “communicates to bridge the generational gap in the workplace.” Additionally, another theme that emerged for Generation X was that their supervisors “use team building activities to bridge the gap.”

Responses varied for Generation Y, with no recurring theme or commonality in the way their supervisor bridges the gap in the workplace. Generation Y participants indicated that their supervisor “makes sure everyone is on the same page” or that their supervisors “try as a team to come up with different idea’s that everyone can agree upon.”

The second question, “What do you do to bridge the generation gap in the workplace?” established that the Baby Boomer Generation did have commonalities in their responses. The Baby Boomer Generation established that “communication” was how they try to bridge the gap in the workplace.

Generation X had three recurring themes emerge. The trend that had the most responses was that they try to “communicate” to bridge the generation gap in the workforce. Another theme that emerged is that Generation X thinks it is important to be “respectful” in the workforce. Being able to “listen” in the workplace was another commonality that was stated for Generation X when asked how they bridge the generation gap in the workplace.

Responses varied for Generation Y, with no recurring theme or commonality in the way they bridge the generation gap in the workplace. Generation Y indicated that they “try not to be judgmental” or that they “listen to other employees.”

Discussion

The researcher explored the generational differences in attitudes in the workplace among three generational cohorts who work in the sport industry. Based on the findings and theoretical framework from the literature, the following discussion addresses the three research questions of the study. This study shall be considered the first to explore generational differences in attitudes in the workplace that focus solely on the sport industry.

Research Question 1. What attitudes and preferences are similar in different generations working in the sport industry?

The first research question sought to examine the similarities of attitudes of members of the Baby Boomer Generation (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1981), and Generation Y (1982–2000) working in the sport industry. Although there were many similarities between the generational cohorts (see Table 6), there were a number of survey questions that provided insight into specific generational attitudes and how they compare to previous research.

Each generational cohort “strongly agreed” that job security is a “top priority” in their sport organization. The Baby Boomer generation has been labeled as “the largest proportion of workaholics in history” (Sessa et al., 2007), thus implying that having a workaholic mentality secures one’s job. As for Generation X and Generation Y, witnessing the downward spiral of the economy, having job security of any type is important.

For the survey questions “I prefer group projects to individual projects” and “Teams are more effective in accomplishing work projects than individuals” are examples of what the research indicates all three generations consider to be important. Downing (2006) stated that Generation Y is “both feedback oriented and team oriented” (p. 6). However, the research conducted for this study indicated that there is no significant difference between the cohorts.

All three generational cohorts indicated that having a “balance between work and family” in the workplace is important. Previous research indicated that Generation X has a higher desire for balance in the workplace while this is not considered something significant for the Baby Boomer Generation or Generation Y (Kunreuther, 2007; Lovely, 2008; Sullivan et al., 2009). This research indicated that all three generational cohorts feel that having a balance between work and family is important, regardless of their generational cohort. Each generational cohort indicated that the number of vacation days and having time off from work is a strong incentive in the workplace. The findings from this section of the study may be due to the possibility that working in the sport industry has different demands and different hours than does a standard 40-hour work week. Many jobs in the sport industry include working irregular hours and extended hours, implying that finding a balance between their job and their family is important.

Each generational cohort considered themselves loyal to the sport organization at their site of employment, yet despite this loyalty, they can consider job opportunities at another sport organization. Additionally, each generation felt that it was important to “follow the appropriate chain of command.” Those from the Baby Boomer Generation, and Generation X hold the majority of positions, but as the Baby Boomer Generation begin to retire from their positions in the sport industry, those from both Generation X and Generation Y will use the vacancies to advance their career.

This study suggested that those currently working for a sport organization indicated that having a “strong voice in decision making” while “being creative” is important in their current position. All three generational cohorts “Agree” that this is a key attitude to have while working in the sport industry. This information coincides with previous research that Generation Y is unafraid to approach leaders with their concerns, and that Generation X feels it is important for their voice to be heard, regardless of whether it is perceived in a positive way by their coworkers (Lovely, 2008; Moody, 2008).

One particular survey question, “In general, I prefer to communicate in person or by telephone, rather than by electronic methods (e-mail, text, etc.)” indicated that each generational cohort had no specific preference as to how information was delivered in their workplace. The Baby Boomer Generation, Generation X, and Generation Y all answered this question in a similar way, indicating that they were “Neutral” about the way information was delivered in their sport organization. This indicates to the researcher that each generation feels that communicating through the use of technology in their sport organization is not of paramount importance. This does not fit with current research that the Baby Boomer Generation is resisting technology in the workplace (Fletcher et al., 2009; Joseph & Stone, 2005; Rosen, 2004; Stein & Berardinelli, 2009). Therefore, additional investigation should be conducted on the attitudinal differences toward technology in the workplace.

Research Question 2. What attitudes and preferences are different between generations working in the sport industry?

The second research question sought to examine the differences of attitudes of the members of the Baby Boomer Generation (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1981), and Generation Y (1982–2000) working in the sport industry. Having a better understanding of these differences in the workplace is important because frustration and aggravation can be directly linked with how each generation views the concept of work (Ansoorian et al., 2003). Various attitudes in the workplace have emerged (see Table 7): the Baby Boomer Generation and Generation Y have significant differences in their preferences for attitudes in the workplace, whereas Generation X typically sided with either the Baby Boomer Generation or Generation Y.

Supporting previous research, members of Generation X and Generation Y working for a sport organization agree that they “prefer group projects to individual projects” and “having good working relationships with colleagues” is important. This information coincides with literature indicating that Generation X and Generation Y enjoy working in teams, and will take advice or ask peers their opinion in the workplace more than will members of the Baby Boomer Generation (Downing, 2006; Moody, 2008).

Results from the study indicated that Generation X and Generation Y “Strongly Agreed” that it is “important to be challenged at my job,” a response that the Baby Boomer Generation answered significantly differently. The Baby Boomer Generation agreed that it is important to be challenged in their sport organization but significantly less than did members of Generation X and Generation Y. Previous research indicated that being challenged at work was only important to the Baby Boomer Generation and Generation X (Sullivan et al., 2009). However, this study did not agree with previous research. The shift in this data may be because of the small percentage of the Baby Boomer Generation working in the sport industry who completed the survey.

Govitvatana (2001) suggested that Generation X is motivated by salary, bonus structure, and training. This research concluded that those from Generation X and Generation Y working in the sport industry “Agree” that both bonus pay and overtime pay in the workplace are considered strong motivators. The Baby Boomer Generation expressed no preference when asked if “bonus pay and/or overtime pay” were strong motivators for them and each cohort was neutral toward their sport organization offering tuition aid, continuing education, and professional-development incentives. This may be an indication that those from the Baby Boomer Generation cohort have no interest in tuition aid, that they have no desire to “go back to school” at this point of their life, and that their interest may be geared toward retirement.

Additional information from this research supports previous findings that the Baby Boomer Generation working in higher level positions in an organization may struggle to keep Generation Y employed if the younger employees are not promoted quickly (Moody, 2008). Unlike the Baby Boomer Generation who are “happy” to stay in their current position or company until retirement (p. 86), participants from Generation X and Generation Y indicated in this research that they “Strongly Agree” that the opportunity for advancement is very important. It may pose a threat to some organizations that Generation Y members may feel eager to advance in the sport industry. If they cannot find opportunities in their current sport organization, the employees of the X and Y generation would not hesitate to find work in another sport organization.

In working with individuals from different backgrounds in the workplace, the Baby Boomer Generation working for a sport industry does not support previous findings. Prior research indicates that individuals from the Baby Boomer cohort do not see diversity in the workplace as important (Fletcher, 2009). Results of this research indicated that Generation X and Generation Y working for a sport organization place a higher value and have a different attitude when it comes to diversity in the workforce. Both Generation X and Generation Y, “Strongly Agree” that they are “comfortable working with people from different backgrounds and cultures.” The Baby Boomer Generation does not “Strongly Agree” with this statement and is considered to be statistically different from Generation X and Generation Y; the Baby Boomer Generation “Agree” that they are comfortable working with people from different backgrounds and cultures.

Research Question 3. What efforts are taking place in the sport industry to close the generation gap?

There were two open-ended questions that addressed Research Question 3. A qualitative analysis was conducted to establish emerging themes and trends. The participants in this research sought to represent the voices of the sport industry. The first question asked participants what their supervisor did to bridge the gap in the workplace. The second open-ended question asked participants what they were doing in the workplace to bridge the generation gap. The topic of communication was brought up as a predominant theme in both questions.

One member of the Baby Boomer Generation who currently works for a professional sports team identified himself as a General Manager/Executive Director. This participant's supervisor "offers opportunity to listen to my point of view."

One Generation X participant who works in the collegiate setting and is the Assistant Director of Academic and Membership Affairs, stated, "our environment is one which actually uses the different perspectives of its employees as an advantage rather than noting it is a gap. Various perspectives are always solicited and taken into account." Finally, a member from Generation Y who works for a professional organization and is the Community Affairs Coordinator, equally identified that communication efforts take place between employees and their supervisors, discussing their common goals and interests with each other.

Findings from this study support previous research that communication is important for any organization, despite generational cohort. This research supports the notion that the "so-called generation gap is the result of miscommunication and misunderstanding" in the workplace (Deal, 2007; Govitvatana, 2001). The responses from this research indicate that by having an open line of communication, managers and leaders provide a willingness to bridge the generation gap with their colleagues and coworkers in the sport industry.

Equally important to supervisors' actions geared towards bridging the generational gap are the efforts of individuals in non-managerial positions. Universal participation is essential if this goal is to be achieved in the sport industry. The second open-ended question was intended for participants to consider the efforts they were putting forth to bridge the generation gap.

All three generations stated that they "communicate" to bridge the generation gap in the workplace. A head coach who works at the collegiate level and is from the Baby Boomer Generation simply stated "communication" as his response to how he bridges the generation gap in workplace. Additionally, another from the Baby Boomer Generation, who is also working in the collegiate setting and is an Associate Athletic Director, "communicates well" and feels that there exists a "healthy working relationship" with coworkers. Another Associate Athletic Director working in a collegiate environment who is from Generation X also "communicates as much as possible." Another member from Generation X, who is the Director of Team Travel in the professional-sport setting stated communication is enhanced when "asking for other advice and seek[ing] others' knowledge." As for those from Generation Y, communication was a key term when describing how they bridge the generation gap in the workplace. One participant from Generation Y who works for a professional-sport organization and is the Coordinator of Premium Seating "tries to listen to other employees" to bridge the gap in the workplace.

Understanding how to bridge the generation gap in the workplace promotes a more cooperative, cohesive, and productive environment (Deal, 2007). A better understanding will assist managers and leaders working in the sport industry to bridge the generation gap.

Despite one's generational cohort, using the power of communication in the workplace should be a considered a priority of any organization. The sport industry, one of the fastest growing industries in the United States, must find ways to address generational differences openly and directly (*Street & Smith's SportsBusiness Journal*, 2009). Generation Y has gradually emerged in the industry; many have obtained a degree in sport administration from one of the many degree-offering programs. Generation X desires to continue their climb in the industry, as the Baby Boomer Generation works toward retirement. Each generation works together in an industry that often requires long hours and late nights. The many similarities and differences among the generations will be expressed and bridged through communication efforts in the sport industry.

Recommendation

Inherent in the research process is the acknowledgement of the need for investigation beyond the scope of any one study. On the basis of this study, implications for the sport industry and recommendations for future research will be explored and examined as ways for educators to prepare for issues that arise among generations of employees. Additionally, managers and leaders must anticipate, evaluate, and/or resolve organizational issues that arise between generations.

Implications for the Sport Industry

The present study provides several industry implications and ways that those working in the sport industry can (a) better understand the similarities of each generation working in the sport industry, (b) better understand the differences among generations working in the sport industry, and (c) find effective ways for a sport organization to close the generation gap in the workplace.

The sport industry should strive to support and provide employees with ways to find a “balance between work and family” in the workplace. The Baby Boomer Generation, Generation X, and Generation Y, indicated that having a balance between work and family is an important asset in the workplace. Nicholas (2009) indicated that “having an understanding of what individuals from different generations like and dislike will assist in motivating, retaining, training and recruiting of workers” (p. 60).

The sport industry should consider ways to increase the communicative efforts in their organization as a way to bridge the generation gap. As indicated by the results, communication was the emerging theme for each generation as a way to close the generation gap. Supported by Deal (2007), the “so-called generation gap, is the result of miscommunication and misunderstanding” (p. 1).

One caution that should be noted is that the similarities and differences in attitudes should not be overgeneralized for a specific generation. Though the results of this research can be generalized to some extent, the study is limited in its scope.

Recommendations for Future Research

On the basis of this study, the following recommendations for the sport industry, for practitioners, and for future investigations conducted in this area of bridging the generation gap are as follows:

Further research should incorporate sport-administration programs from other institutions. This would expand the number of participants to those who have received the educational background that prepares them to work in the sport industry.

Additional research should be conducted on a broader scale, involving multiple industries, to provide an analysis in comparison to the sport industry. There are some specific requirements of working in the sport industry that may have impacted the results.

Further research could investigate the loyalty of employees in a sport organization. This research indicated that those working for a sport organization considered themselves to be loyal to their organization but could also consider searching for another job. It is highly recommended that further qualitative research such as interviews and focus-group studies be conducted to understand the seeming paradox.

Additional research should investigate generational attitudes in the workplace in a focused capacity. Focusing research on one sport organization might give better insight into specific differences of the generational cohorts that work for that particular organization. For example, rather than focusing on alumni of a sport-administration program, researchers could focus on one specific organization. Research of front-office personnel from a professional- or collegiate-sport setting should be considered.

Additional research efforts should investigate communicative efforts in a sport organization. This research indicated that those working for a sport organization feel that communication is the way to bridge the generation gap. To add depth to this research, additional qualitative research such as interviews, focus-group, and case studies should be carried out to gain a better understanding of how communication efforts are effective

Tables

Table 1

Distribution of Subjects According to Gender

Gender	<i>N</i>	%
Male	74	67.3
Female	36	32.7
Total	110	100.0

Table 2

Distribution of Subjects According to Generational Cohort

Generational cohort	<i>N</i>	Percent %
Baby Boomer	19	17.3
Generation X	79	71.8
Generation Y	12	10.9
Total	110	100.0

Table 3

Distributions of Subjects According to Highest Level of Education

Generational cohort	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Doctoral degree
Baby Boomer	2	12	5
Generation X	13	60	6
Generation Y	2	8	2
Total	17	80	13

Table 4

Distribution of Subjects According to Sport Environment

Generational cohort	Amateur/recreational	Collegiate	Professional	Other
Baby Boomer	1	13	2	3
Generation X	11	22	30	16
Generation Y	2	5	5	0
Total	14	40	37	19

Table 5
Distribution of Subjects According to Organizational Level

Generational cohort	Entry level	Middle management	Upper management	Executive
Baby Boomer	0	4	10	3
Generation X	6	30	24	18
Generation Y	7	4	1	0
Total	13	38	35	21

Table 6
Questions That Have No Statistically Significant Difference Among Generational Cohorts

Questions	Mean, Std and median for each generation			p
	Baby boomer	Generation X	Generation Y	
18. I prefer group projects to individual projects	2.74, .45, 3.0	2.97, .86, 3.0	3.42, .79, 3.0	0.0704
7. Job security is my top priority	3.32, .89, 3.0	3.46, 1.0, 4.0	4.08, .90, 4.0	0.0775
28. Having a strong voice in decision-making is important to me	4.05, .71, 4.0	4.30, .67, 4.0	3.92, .67, 4.0	0.0787
17. Tuition aid for continuing education/professional development is a strong incentive for me	2.89, .81, 3.0	3.29, .96, 3.0	3.75, 1.1, 3.0	0.0871
2. I take my job performance appraisals very seriously	3.89, 1.1, 4.0	4.41, .73, 5.0	4.50, .52, 4.5	0.1012
23. Being allowed creativity is important to me	4.21, .54, 4.0	4.42, .61, 4.0	4.08, .67, 4.0	0.1090
1. Close supervision improves my performance	2.53, .90, 2.0	3.06, 1.0, 3.0	2.92, .90, 3.0	0.1261
9. I can consider job opportunities at another organization while remaining loyal	4.11, .66, 4.0	4.23, .85, 4.0	3.92, .67, 4.0	0.1430
15. In general, I prefer to communicate in person or by telephone, rather than by electronic methods (email, text, etc..)	3.05, 1.1, 3.0	3.44, 1.1, 3.0	2.92, .67, 3.0	0.1526
22. The number of vacation days available is very important when choosing an employer	3.21, .98, 3.0	3.51, .97, 4.0	3.08, 1.0, 3.0	0.1723
5. I consider myself to be more work-focused than family-focused	3.26, .73, 3.0	2.90, 1.2, 3.0	3.08, .90, 3.0	0.2074
26. I follow the appropriate chain of command	4.16, .37, 4.0	4.24, .70, 4.0	4.00, .60, 4.0	0.2683
3. I appreciate formality in speech and dress in the workplace	3.58, .96, 4.0	3.51, 1.0, 4.0	4.00, .74, 4.0	0.2684
29. I am inconvenienced by having to attend an unexpected meeting	2.68, .75, 3.0	2.77, .97, 3.0	2.33, 1.2, 2.0	0.2809
11. My co-workers are competent at what they do on the job	4.05, .62, 4.0	3.92, .66, 4.0	4.08, 1.1, 4.0	0.2932

Questions	Mean, Std and median for each generation			<i>p</i>
	Baby boomer	Generation X	Generation Y	
25. Having a company-funded retirement plan is important to me	4.05, .62, 4.0	4.25, .65, 4.0	4.08, .79, 4.0	0.3646
27. Tangible awards, such as trophies, plaques and parking spaces, are strong motivators for me	2.26, .65, 2.0	2.48, .85, 2.0	2.67, .98, 3.0	0.3875
31. A balance between work and family is important to me	4.42, .69, 5.0	4.61, .63, 5.0	4.42, .79, 5.0	0.3879
6. I am comfortable working with members of the opposite sex	4.58, .51, 5.0	4.68, .47, 5.0	4.50, .67, 5.0	0.5322
36. I have experienced challenges related to generational differences in the workplace	3.42, .96, 4.0	3.41, 1.1, 3.0	3.08, .79, 3.0	0.5839
35. Having comprehensive health insurance is important to me	4.37, .60, 4.0	4.46, .69, 5.0	4.33, .78, 4.5	0.6568
24. Teams are more effective in accomplishing work projects than individuals	3.16, .76, 3.0	3.32, .81, 3.0	3.50, .80, 3.0	0.6890
19. Having an inexpensive health insurance plan is important to me	4.00, .47, 4.0	4.04, .78, 4.0	4.17, .83, 4.0	0.7130
8. I am loyal to the organization for which I work	4.47, .51, 4.0	4.49, .62, 5.0	4.50, .67, 5.0	0.9168
10. I welcome unexpected meetings to receive important information and updates	3.95, .78, 4.0	3.85, .86, 4.0	3.92, .90, 4.0	0.9554

Table 7

Questions That Have Statistically Significant Difference Among Generational Cohorts

Questions	Mean, std and Median for each generation				p
	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Generation Y		
32. Opportunity for advancement is important to me	3.79, .79, 4.0a*	4.56, .57, 5.0b	4.75, .45, 5.0b		<.0001
13. Bonus pay and/or overtime pay are strong motivators for me	3.05, .85, 3.0a	3.94, .94, 4.0b	4.42, .90, 5.0b		0.0002
34. I am comfortable working with people from different backgrounds and cultures	4.21, .54, 4.0a	4.72, .45, 5.0b	4.75, .62, 5.0b		0.0003
33. Having good working relationships with my colleagues is important to me	4.16, .50, 4.0a	4.61, .52, 5.0b	4.83, .39, 5.0b		0.0007
16. Competition among co-workers is a strong motivator for me	2.42, .77, 2.0a	2.97, .97, 3.0a	3.75, .75, 4.0b		0.0008
12. I would enjoy attending company-sponsored social events for employees and their families	3.32, .75, 3.0a	3.96, .94, 4.0b	4.33, .49, 4.0b		0.0018
21. It is important to me that the organization I work for is loyal to employees	4.26, .56, 4.0a	4.66, .50, 5.0a	4.83, .39, 5.0b		0.0042
14.** It is important to me to be challenged at my job	3.89, .66, 4.0a	4.37, .66, 4.0b	4.50, .90, 5.0ab		0.0063
4. Praise from my supervisor is a strong motivator for me	3.58, .90, 4.0a	4.19, .82, 4.0b	4.08, .90, 4.0ab		0.0208
30. Time-off from work would be a strong incentive for me	3.16, .83, 3.0a	3.61, .90, 4.0a	3.08, 1.1, 3.0a		0.0269
20. Special recognition is a strong motivation for me	2.89, .74, 3.0a	3.44, .96, 4.0a	3.58, 1.1, 3.5a		0.0381

Generations with the same letter are considered not statistically significantly different. Pair-wise comparison was only used to indicate which generation has higher score. Since our study is not a confirmatory experiment, this is only for the convenience of description of our results.

**For question 14, though generation Y has a highest mean, the difference is not significantly different from generation Baby Boomer. This is caused by small sample size.

Table 10

Distribution of Subjects According to Gender for Open-ended Questions

Gender	N	%
Male	46	67.6
Female	22	32.4
Total	68	100.0

Table 11

Distribution of Subjects According to Generational Cohort for Open-ended Questions

Generational cohort	N	%
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Baby Boomer	10	14.7
Generation X	53	77.8
Generation Y	5	7.5
Total	68	100.0

Table 12

Distributions of Subjects According to Highest Level of Education for Open-ended Questions

Generational cohort	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Doctoral degree
Baby Boomer	1	7	2
Generation X	7	42	4
Generation Y	0	5	0
Total	8	51	6

Table 13

Distribution of Subjects According to Sport Environment for Open-ended Questions

Generational cohort	Amateur/recreational	Collegiate	Professional	Other
Baby Boomer	1	5	2	2
Generation X	9	15	20	9
Generation Y	0	2	3	0
Total	10	21	25	11

Table 14

Distribution of Subjects According to Organizational Level for Open-ended Questions

Generational cohort	Entry level	Middle management	Upper management	Executive
Baby Boomer	0	3	4	2
Generation X	4	19	19	10
Generation Y	3	2	0	0
Total	7	24	23	12

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