

Managing the Value Gap among Generations in Organizations: Socio-Psychological Approach

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Abstract

Over the few past decades, value gap among generations has presented new challenges for organizations. Although studies have suggested value congruence as a mechanism to bring generations closer together, this study presents evidence showing that providing an autonomy-supportive environment, where higher levels of psychological need satisfaction for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are experienced by employees, facilitates the process of internalization and embrace of others' values. Such a context would result in better communication, mutual understanding, and bridging the generation gap effectively at workplace.

Keywords: Generation, Value, Internalization

Introduction

Nowadays people talk about enormous gulf between older and younger generation in values. The difference that can be well understood where different generations are participating in a single organization, or when a deep misunderstanding is progressively becoming problematic and affecting organizational outcomes (Zemke et al., 2000). Social demographers have attributed the difference to the era in which each individual lives, and upon which they have separated people into distinct generational group including baby boomers (1943-1960), generation X (1961-1981), and generation Y (1982-2002). They claimed that the era is powerful enough in shaping people's values and beliefs (Strauss & Howe, 2009)

Researchers (e.g., Chatman, 1989; Jones, 2013; Gonzalez, 2016) have focused on P-O fit (in general) and value congruence (in particular) as a solution to bridge the gap among different values. However, results of a Meta-analytic review (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) revealed a weak relationship between value congruence and behavioral outcomes such as job performance, intention to leave and tenure, and also a weak to moderate correlation with satisfaction and commitment (Hoffman & Woehr, 2006).

Alizadeh (2007) emphasized that new generations are not motivated simply by conventional *motivational programs such as* rewards, promotions, and value congruence; from *many years ago*, the effectiveness of these solutions have not been yet proven in companies. Organizations often fail in providing employees with lots of motivation drivers and making congruency, due to the much cost and time associated with it. It raises a question how the gap between youth and old generation can be bridged so that benefits both the individuals and the organizations. Our approach suggests switching from value congruency to value internalization, although lack of organizational research in this area provided less insight into the potential effectiveness of this approach to resolve the conflict and restore the harmony.

Social Context and Value Differences

Generation theorists believe social, political, and economical events that happen during at cohorts impressionable age lead to formation of generation's identity which is a particular set of values, beliefs, and also behaviors that stay relatively stable over the generation's lifetime and distinguish one generation from another (Strauss& Howe, 2009). Baby boomer generation witnessed war, revolution, and movement. They grew up in an era where they have learned to challenge over power, and hard working wasn't only rewarded but was respected (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Baby boomers have described a mindset of living to work, being in a high authority position, and having security (Wong et al., 2008). Differently, X-ers have been influenced by economic recession, high unemployment, family instabilities, and downsized organization (Chen&Choi, 2008). Therefore they place less value on patiently working for organizations. Work is regarded as "just a job". Xers value learning new things to enhance employability, freedom, and competence (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998). The next era in which generation Y has grown up was the age of technology and an ever changing environment. They feel comfortable with changes and are less likely to seek job security (Hart, 2006). Not only did they have the support provided by family, but they also had established infrastructures including childcare, pre and after school programs, and many extracurricular activities, highly structured and scheduled (Weston, 2006). Hence, yet, there is no surprise if this generation has high expectations and values challenging work, rapid promotion, structure and direction, variety in the job, and change in the roles (Chen& Choi, 2008).

As a result, the social context in which generations have brought up determines the type of values to be held. As recent studies (Davis, 2016; Heritage et al., 2016) have documented evidences of significant differences in value priorities among Baby boomers, X-ers, and Y-ers within an organizational setting.

Bridge the Gap through Value Internalization

According to Self Determination Theory (Deci& Ryan, 1985), human beings regardless of gender, culture, or age have innate tendency toward well being which requires 1) fulfillment of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and 2) social support. Psychological needs originate from self and reflect in values which organize goals for individuals to follow. They make people feel intrinsically motivated for doing a certain type of behavior. But, all individual behaviors aren't always arisen from the self and its needs. Individuals are

inherently motivated to internalize the values of other people, which are external but useful for well functioning in the social world, into intrinsically endorsed values through multistage process of internalization including introjected regulation, when individuals take in external values to gain approval or a sense of pride ; identified regulation, when people consciously value a goal as important to self in order to achieve a long-term success such as fulfillment career expectation; integrated regulation, if the valued goals fully assimilate to the self ,and people take on responsibility to perform it, it is said the value integrated with one's self and its quality is similar to intrinsic motivation. (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

Internalized values and intrinsic values are both natural and working in a complementary fashion to encourage people toward adaptation in social context and growth. Intrinsically motivated involvement in tasks is for its own sake yielding enthusiasm and interest for short-term process goals, whereas internalized values keep people resistant to accomplish long-term goals because they are personally important and useful, although not interested. Both intrinsically valued goal and well- internalized extrinsic values are associated with satisfaction of psychological needs and receiving social support, which are requirements of well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2002)

Internalized value means that values have been accepted as important with the external reasons provided by others. Those reasons are more likely to become internalized when people feel the activity will connect them securely to others (relatedness), even when they perceive a feeling of efficacy by doing the action (competence), or experience a sense of choice to decide (autonomy). Hence, satisfaction of basic psychological needs is still a central pillar for internalization occurrence (Deci & Ryan, 2002)

Studies (Guñtert, 2015; Wang et al., 2016) showed autonomy-supportive contexts have been found to lead to intrinsic motivation (Amoura, 2015), and both intrinsic motivation and identified regulation were reported to be positively related to job satisfaction, civic virtue, and altruism, and negatively related to turnover intention demonstrating that intrinsic motivation and well-internalized extrinsic motivation are both predictive of specific work outcomes (Guñtert, 2015)

Therefore, environments that promote satisfaction of the basic psychological needs will make preparation for full internalization of organizational values that has been established by adults, and that this will lead to building better communication and relatedness, participation and involvement, cognitive flexibility, positive attitudes and job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviors, commitment and psychological adjustment and well-being(Gagné & Deci 2005). As results of studies supported the effect of well-being on work-related behaviors such as performance (Sharma, 2016) turnover intention (Gillet et al., 2015; Siu et al., 2015) productivity (Puig-Ribera et al., 2016), and commitment (Afshari& Gibson, 2015).

Conclusion

Current study has shed light on the basic psychological needs as the origin of human values and clarified the centrality of *social context to differentiate among* values and distinguish one generation from another. Although reviewing literature suggested value congruence as a solution to bridge the gap among different values held by different generations, this study

came up with another idea to address the issue. Attempts at creating a autonomy-supportive environment that provides opportunities for satisfaction of basic psychological needs will pave the way for adults' values to be accepted and internalized by younger generation and, finally, benefit both the individual and the organization.

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