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Occupational Values: Intergenerational Differences

This paper looks at the problem of intergenerational diversity in the realm of subject-oriented value systems. A total of 458 people (220 men and 238 women) aged 21 to 66 took part in the study. Edgar Schein's "Career Anchors" questionnaire (as adapted by A. Paszkowska-Rogacz) was used to assess occupational values. Statistical analyses demonstrated significant relations between values prized in professional work and the age of the employee. Younger people proved to be more interested in leadership and facing challenges. Security and stability are the values most appreciated by the older generation. These results are significant in occupational fit. Taking into account subject-oriented values in organizational practice facilitates the maintenance of an optimal person-work environment balance (including in the context of intergroup differences).

Key words: values, age, work, organization, person-environment fit.

Introduction

The aging of society and growing demographic imbalance are phenomena in which we are all both witnesses and participants. Several generations are presently functioning on the labor market. They have been shaped by different social, economic, cultural, and political influences. These generations are characterized by various value systems, needs, expectations, motivation, behavior, habits, roles, and attitudes with respect to life, work, and employers (Beutell and Witting-Berman, 2008; Chrupała-Pniak et al., 2015; Kołodziejczyk-Olczak, 2014; Mazurkiewicz and Moculska, 2014; Smoblik-Jęczmień, 2013; Rogozińska-Pawelczyk, 2014; Woszczyk, 2013; Wziętek-Staśko, 2015), where the meaning of professional work changes in

line with the human life cycle, development process, as well as maturing and aging (Czarnota–Bojarska and Łada, 2004).

Faced with such strong diversity it is necessary to study the specifics of generations, and understand and utilize this knowledge over the course of professional development. Representatives of various age groups insist on distinctiveness in application of techniques of personnel influencing, different job organization, and different work situations. Thus, skill in managing age–diverse employee resources is becoming an important element in the management of human capital (Gajda and Seroka–Stolka, 2014).

Every company has people representing various stages of their professional careers. The proper use of differences in experience, competencies, skills, and subject–based qualities fosters organizational efficiency and the reducing of generation conflicts. Knowledge in this field finds practical application in the optimizing of intergenerational dialogue and platforms for its conducting (Gajda and Seroka–Stolka, 2014). This results in greater understanding and mutual tolerance for differences and otherness. In trying to develop the possibility of drawing conclusions regarding the course of the professional activity of workers of various ages, this study looks at the problem of intergenerational differences in the area of preferred occupational values.

Occupational Values: The E. Schein Concept

Schein’s views are the background for the thinking behind this study. The author, on the basis of research results (Paszowska–Rogacz, 2009, 2011) believes there exists a clear link among the individual’s system of values, needs, competencies, and selected career type. The set of mutually dependent elements (conscious talents, skills, motives, needs, attitudes, and values) have been metaphorically called “Career Anchors” by Schein. Their role is a given orientation—career, stability, and protection against breakdown (Kasprzak, 2013). Schein identified eight career anchor categories:

- Professional competence – A need to achieve a level of professionalism, to be an expert, enrich knowledge and skills, confirm mastery, horizontal promotion;
- Managerial competence – Characteristic of people with a great need to hold authority, financial success, new experiences in management, decision–making;
- Autonomy and independence – Linked with a striving to increase the scope of freedom, independence, responsibility, and working in line with one’s own rules and principles;
- Security and stability – The key motive for action consists of emotional ties with the company, a sense of loyalty, social and financial security, low need for change;

- Creativity and entrepreneurship – Characteristic of creative individuals who are mobile, are full of initiative, enhance their knowledge about themselves and the organization, sensitivity to problems and skill in solving them;

- Service and dedication – Fulfillment through helping others, satisfying social and humanistic values, solving political problems, where this is also the group that is a source of volunteers;

- Challenge – Tied with the need to face up to difficulties, take risks, work in an environment creating opportunities for battles and rivalry;

- Lifestyle – Characteristic of people striving to maintain a balance between work, home, professional life, and family matters, ready to waive higher earnings in favor of time to devote to those closest to them (Paszowska–Rogacz, 2009, 2011).

Schein is of the view that a person may represent more than just one career anchor. What is more, many professions actually expect their combinations (Paszowska–Rogacz, 2009). In observing the dynamics of the contemporary labor market and the both growing and diverse subject range and competency requirements, the position taken by Schein should be considered as well founded and very up-to-date. The views of the author bear fruit in one more significant conclusion: The optimum level of fitness of the individual for work is also achieved through a necessity of convergence between the system of values of the individual and that of the organization. From the point of view of the organization, in light of the wellbeing of the worker and the interests of the organization, this recommendation should prove possible in effective implementation. A fit on a platform of professed values is a factor facilitating the achievement of the goals of both the employee and employer (Paszowska–Rogacz, 2009, 2011). What is more, people who perceive the professional development in agreement with their value orientation achieve higher professional positions and a higher level of satisfaction from work than individuals who see their professional development as being at odds with their prized values (Zalewska, 2000, p. 59).

Materials and Methods

The studied group was made up of 464 working people. However, due to incomplete “Career Anchor” questionnaire data, the data of 458 were used in the analyses. A total of 220 men (48%) and 238 women (52%) took part in the study. The respondents were in the 21–66 age group ($M=37.52$, $SD=11.69$), with a job seniority of 1–45 years ($M=15.01$, $SD=11.34$). Selection of people for the group was random. Those studied were from the Voivodeship of Łódź. The presented study is the outcome of research conducted in collaboration with M. Banaszczyk and K. Biegańska (University of Łódź) over the years 2010–2012.

Three periods of adulthood were defined in light of the tackled research problem: early adulthood (up to 35 years of age, $n=248$, $M=27.74$, $SD=3.97$), middle adulthood (36–55 years of age, $n=193$, $M=48.14$, $SD=4.94$) and late adulthood (over 55 years of age, $n=17$, $M=59.58$, $SD=3.06$).¹ Such a population subdivision used in the study follows the suggestion for periodization of the adult period in topical literature (Olejnik, 2005; Gurba 2005; Straś–Romanowska, 2005). Three significant subdivision criteria—development tasks, changes in the structure of life connected with occurrences typical of various life phases, and life crises—and age thresholds—where 55 is assumed to be the moment when a person becomes an old adult in spite of any significant fuzziness—are taken into account in identifying the stages of this phase of life (Przetacznik–Gierowska, 1996).

The research used the Schein “Career Anchors” Questionnaire as adapted for Poland by Paszkowska–Rogacz (2009). The questionnaire consists of five scales: leadership (where the professional goal is achievement in the area of management, decision–making, influencing, achieving financial success, and improving managerial competencies), challenge (where difficulties are faced and opposed, risks taken, and rivalry engaged), security and stability (where work should provide for security needs and the achievement of emotional ties with the company), lifestyle (where a balance is maintained between work and personal and family life), and service and dedication to others (where humanistic values are the goal as is help provided to others). Those studied have at their disposal a six–point scale for rating the content of twenty–five statements found in the questionnaire (five positions in each scale). The highest result indicates the career anchor most preferred by the studied individual, who should plan and undertake a career on the basis of that anchor. This will result in greater work efficiency and satisfaction. Schein allows for the possibility of a career orientation being tied to more than one anchor. Successive highest results should be treated as supplementary with respect to the most preferred career anchor. The reliability of the “Career Anchors” Questionnaire scale is defined using the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for individual scales and amounts to 0.751 for leadership, 0.755 for challenge, 0.721 for security and stability, 0.622 for lifestyle, and 0.704 for service and dedication (Paszkowska–Rogacz, 2009). Own research gave the following results: 0.835 for leadership, 0.813 for challenge, 0.767 for security and stability, 0.696 for lifestyle, and 0.834 for service and dedication.

1 It is worthwhile to relate the three periods of adulthood to the differentiation of generations as seen on the present labor market: Baby Boomers (people born over the years 1943–1964), Generation X (those born 1965–1979), and Generation Y (born 1980–1989) (Kolodziejczyk–Olczak, 2014; Woszczyk and Gawron, 2014).

Results

Descriptive statistics for the occupational values are presented first (results as received from the “Career Anchors” Questionnaire, Table No. 1).

Table No. 1. Descriptive Statistics for Occupational Values (n=458)

Occupational values	Minimums	Maximum	Percentile		
			25.	50. (Median)	75.
Leadership	5	30	7	11	16
Security and stability	5	30	16	20	24
Service and dedication	5	30	13	17	22
Challenge	5	30	15	18	23
Lifestyle	5	30	19	23	26

Source: Own studies.

The context of differences between the sexes was taken into account in the performed analyses in addition to the aspect of intergenerational differences (Tables No. 2 and No. 3).²

Table No. 2. Spearman’s Rank Correlation Coefficient for Occupational Value and Age Variables for the Whole Studied Group (n=458), for Men (n=220), and for Women (n=238)

Occupational values	Age		
	Whole group n=458	Men n=220	Women n=238
Leadership	-0.244**	-0.210**	-0.267**
Security and stability	0.089	-0.025	0.179**
Service and dedication	0.074	0.064	0.078
Challenge	-0.110*	-0.079	-0.133*
Lifestyle	0.037	-0.063	0.115

* Significant correlation at a level of 0.05; ** significant correlation at a level of 0.01

Source: Own studies.

² In light of the absence of normal distributions among the studied variables and differences in the sizes of the compared groups, the statistical analyses utilized nonparametric tests (the Spearman’s rank correlation analysis, Mann–Whitney U test, and Kruskal–Wallis test).

Table No. 3. Occupational Values in the Group of Men and Women
(Mann–Whitney U test analysis results)

Occupational values	Men n=220		Women n=238		U	Z	P
	Average rank	Rank sum	Average rank	Rank sum			
Leadership	248.86	54,749.50	211.60	50,361.50	21,920.500	-3.016	0.003
Security and stability	220.78	48,571.50	237.56	56,539.50	24,261.500	-1.358	0.175
Service and dedication	215.08	47,318.50	242.83	57,792.50	23,008.500	-2.244	0.025
Challenge	235.61	51,834.00	223.85	53,277.00	24,836.000	-0.951	0.342
Lifestyle	205.19	45,142.00	251.97	59,969.00	20,832.000	-3.787	0.000

U/Z – Mann–Whitney test statistics; p – level of significance

Source: Own studies.

A statistically significant association (with a negative sign) for the age variable was received for the leadership scale for the whole group and for both sexes. The direction of these relations proves that the value of leadership falls with age (the need to extend the range of authority and influence, increasing responsibility and gaining new experience in the area of management). Among the group as a whole and in the group of women, a downward trend is visible in decision-making. At the same time a growing need for security and stability can be observed in women with age.³ The required level of significance was not reached in the correlation coefficients for the service and dedication to others and lifestyle scales. General data illustrating the meaning of work for both sexes provides a broader perspective for interpreting the received results. For men, work is a value in and of itself, where elements of the work environment, linked with work itself, are important—motivators. Women value factors tied to the context of work—hygienic factors according to Herzberg, e.g., relations with workers (Zalewska, 2009). Employment stability and relations with superiors and colleagues are more important to women than men. Men, regardless of job seniority, value development possibilities most (Czarnota–Bojarska and Łada, 2004). Research has demonstrated (Sadowska–Snarska, 2011) that most men treat work as a basic source of livelihood, while women put weight on the non-

3 In other research (Czarnota–Bojarska and Łada, 2004), a high concentration of preference for the “employment stability” aspect was observed in women with medium and high job seniority. This result may be tied to the fact that middle-aged and older women are a group that is particularly at risk of unemployment (Czarnota–Bojarska and Łada, 2004, p. 21).

material functions of work. Decidedly more than in the case of men, for women professional activity provides a sense of personal value and satisfaction and the possibility of social contact. Professional activity helps women discover themselves and build their self-evaluation (Kłosińska, 2010).

Differences in the area of occupational values among men and women were also assessed using the Mann–Whitney U test (Table No. 3).

The results contained in Table No. 3 portray intergenerational differences in the area of three occupational values—leadership, service and dedication to others, and lifestyle. The results in the leadership scale showed that this is a value that is significantly more important for men than for women. This is not a surprising result. For centuries leadership has been in the masculine sphere. The phenomenon of male dominance in areas linked with power and management, the political realm, and business, in spite of observed changes like the promotion of equal rights and a growth in the share of women in leadership positions, continues to be present (Korczyńska, 2008). The second scale of the “Career Anchors” Questionnaire where significant results were received is service and dedication to others. In line with Schein’s theory (Paszowska–Rogacz, 2009), persons representing this value are strongly involved in social action, work as volunteers, live humanistic values, and readily solve the problems of others. Differences found in the results indicate that such experience has greater value for the studied women. The same is true of maintaining a balance between professional life and family life (lifestyle). This is a greater value for women than men. A conclusion that may be drawn is that women, more strongly than men, expect solutions at work that allow the collision-free reconciling of many spheres of life and the conflict-free combining of professional and family obligations. The remaining two scales of the “Career Anchors” Questionnaire did not result in the required statistical significance.

Verification of the basic assumptions relating to the role of age in differentiating preferences for occupational values was conducted applying the Kruskal–Wallis test (Table No. 4). The significance of differences between groups was defined using the Tamhane test.

Results depicted in Table No. 4 broaden the scope of earlier conclusions. What was uncovered was the difference in career anchor levels as a dependence of analyzed age group. Representatives of early adulthood received the highest results on the leadership scale, while people from the oldest group had the lowest ones. A similar breakdown of results was received in the case of the challenge scale. The youngest of those studied had the lowest results for the security and stability scale.

Table No. 4. The Kruskal–Wallis Test for Occupational Values among Younger, Middle, and Older Adults

Occupational values	Age group	Average rank	Squared–chi	p
Leadership	Young adults	259.38	27.691	0.000
	Middle adults	194.46		
	Older adults	191.32		
Security and stability	Young adults	215.21	6.367	0.041
	Middle adults	245.81		
	Older adults	252.82		
Service and dedication	Young adults	219.63	3.036	0.219
	Middle adults	241.53		
	Older adults	236.97		
Challenge	Young adults	244.46	7.038	0.030
	Middle adults	212.72		
	Older adults	201.79		
Lifestyle	Young adults	224.22	0.864	0.649
	Middle adults	235.68		
	Older adults	236.32		

Tamhane test results: Leadership: young adults > middle adults, young adults > older adults; security and stability: young adults > middle adults; challenge: young adults > middle adults.

Source: Own studies.

Discussion of the Results

The primary research question asked by this study was if the age of the worker was a factor differentiating the studied persons in the area of prized occupational values. Application of the Kruskal–Wallis test showed the differing share of adulthood stage with respect to preferred occupational values. Significant results were received for three “Career Anchors” Questionnaire scales—leadership, challenge, and security and stability. Leadership had significantly greater value for younger people as opposed to older ones.

In light of the presented data, it may be assumed that young workers value aspects of power, having influence and control as well as expanded scope of decision–making and managing others, which is in contrast to older people. Young people, more often than older ones, seek professional areas where they can acquire such experience and so develop and improve their managerial competencies. Work

environments attracting young people with the analyzed value profile are mainly the financial and marketing spheres as well as broadly understood business. These are areas of professional activity that most strongly stress characteristics such as rivalry, dominance, and personal influence. Bearing in mind the structural changes in contemporary organizations, managerial competencies are expected on ever-lower management levels and even taken on by the staff and leaders of task groups (Kasprzak, 2013). This fact may be tied with decisions made by the young, who in studies devoted to the identification of the expectations of Generation Y with respect to professional work and employers (Stachowska, 2012a) defined their preferences as to managerial work (power and influence) at a level of 16.6%, managing their own company (power and risk) at 258.5%, and with respect to teamwork, 33.7% (the most indications).

Also proven by the research presented in this study were preferences taking into account age group with respect to the challenge value. A worker oriented at performing professional tasks in the challenge category is effective in the role of decision-maker, negotiator, and manager. Such an employee will prove him- or herself in situations of crisis and uncertainty. He or she will find a place on the contemporary labor market—unstable, unpredictable, and necessitating quick reactions and nonstandard solutions (Kasprzak, 2013, p. 28). The younger generation demonstrates greater readiness with respect to such challenges. In line with their characteristic (Stachowska, 2012a), representatives of Generation Y are oriented for changes, innovation, and expect involvement in complex and inspiring projects that exercise their creativity. They are flexible, ready for challenges, training, and mentoring. They value possibilities for their own development (Brdulak, 2014, p. 164).

Members of the older generation are generally less willing to enter competition, they no longer seek rivalry in areas that best be left to younger people. They tend to concentrate on matters that guarantee them a sense of control over their own actions (Rathus, 2004).⁴ Workers in the 50+ category value lucid governing rules and long-term security and stability (Kołodziejczyk-Olczak, 2014). Research results (Czarnota-Bojarska and Łada, 2004) show a growth in the importance of employment stability in the older group. A similar regularity can be seen in the presented results: the breakdown of results for the security and stability scale proves that it is a value that is most prized by the older generation. Characteristics of the generations present on the labor market (Kołodziejczyk-Olczak, 2014; Woszczyk and

4 However, experience accumulates with age. As the years pass and as a result of many years of experience, older people acquire “wisdom”—highly developed declarative, procedural, and expert knowledge. These factors are prerequisite to functional effectiveness and efficiency (Warr, 2003, pp. 441–457).

Gawron, 2014) clearly map these generational differences. A peaceful life, suitable material and living conditions, and broadly understood stability—political, economic, and social—are the preferences of the representatives of the Baby Boomer generation (born in the years 1946–1964), today’s 50+ generation. What is important for Generation Y (born in the years 1980–1989), young adults, is the taking up of various challenges, personal development, and improving personal potential. Research results (Smoblik–Jęczmień, 2013), illustrating the approach to work and professional career of people of Generations X and Y, confirm the differences in expectations of workers from other age groups. Work security and stability are of lesser value to representatives of the younger generation who, to a greater extent than older workers (Generation X) seek new challenges and possibilities for personal development.

A different image of generations remains in agreement with the periodization of professional development as proposed by Super (Paszowska–Rogacz, 2003). The author identified successive phases of individual development (including professional development) that are characterized by a different value system and types of tasks. In the mature stage (45–64 years of age), in the consolidation phase, the individual strives to maintain his or her stable place in the world of labor. Activities initiated earlier tend to be developed rather than new ones being initiated and growth in orientation aimed at achievements to date is seen. This is different than in the early adulthood stage, the taking up of position phase (25–44 years of age) where the individual initially often makes decisions to change work. This rather typical expression of early adulthood is also visible in the research. Almost half of the representatives of Generation Y taking part in the study agreed with the statement from the already cited project, “I expect change in my future work, interesting and exciting occurrences and risk; I am not afraid of frequent changes in my place of work” (Stachowska, 2012a). The youngest participants in the labor market (Generation Z, born after the year 1990) also have similar expectations. Work should be a source of development. It should expand horizons and be a source of satisfaction derived from performed jobs. Work that fails to meet the expectations of the youngest workers leads them to resign and leave the company, even if the price is a longer hunt and interference with stable employment (Galaj, 2014, p. 92).

The presented results fit into the broader perspective of research on the professional activity and preferences of representatives of various generations. The results demonstrate (Zalewska, 1996) that age has an impact on the importance assigned to the motive of autonomy and stimulation in the case of the middle adults. This is of lesser importance to younger people. Altruism, for its part, is a value that is more prized by representatives of the older generation. Empirical data (McNeese–Smith

and Cook, 2003; Warr, 2003) illustrate the preferences of representatives of differing age groups with respect to the main qualities of the work performed. The outcome of these comparisons indicates that high requirements with respect to work, its diversity, and feedback take on lesser importance with age. It is the value of employment stability and security that grow in importance (Warr, 2003). A similar effect has been seen in other research (Ros, Schwarz, and Surkiss, 1999). Older people (teachers subjected to study) clearly valued transparency in work, which served to achieve a sense of security and closer social relations. Qualities such as persuasive abilities, openness, readiness to make new acquaintances, inventiveness, competitiveness, a success-orientation, and decision-making capacity are on a lower level with age (Warr, 2003). Employees from the oldest age groups also demonstrate that they are less favorably inclined with respect to changes (Lubrańska, 2007).

The area of age management cannot be overlooked in this whole discussion. Age management instruments serve to limit age barriers by promoting diversity and fostering the molding of an environment in which individual workers can achieve their potential regardless of age (Kołodziejczyk-Olczak, 2013b, p. 64). Actions that are mainly of a personnel nature also have an impact on various phases of employment (Kołodziejczyk-Olczak, 2013a) and encroach on all functions and processes involved in human resource management (Stachowska, 2012b). The individual character of the applied age management instruments should assume a familiarity with typical expectations and preferred values for the given life phase. In organizational practice this will serve to improve efficiency in designing professional development paths and support for the worker in various phases of his or her career (Doraczyńska, 2012). Personnel efforts will become more effective and the organization shall acquire greater certainty of the effective utilization of personnel resources, while the worker shall experience individual interest and an individual approach.

New solutions are being sought in the face of the current as well as the forecast demographic situation and the ever-increasing age diversity of the worker population. Presently, the labor market is home to various generations not only in terms of their birth certificates. The generations have differing needs, preferences, and expectations with respect to work (determined not only by individual value systems, but also current life and professional situation). Discovering the specifics of the functioning of representatives of various generations can optimize actions taken by employers, make multigenerational management more efficient, and facilitate care for conflict-free coexistence of the representatives of various generations, with benefits for the company and the worker.

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Wartości cenione w pracy zawodowej – różnice międzypokoleniowe

Streszczenie

W artykule podjęto problem zróżnicowania międzypokoleniowego w zakresie podmiotowych systemów wartości. W badaniu uczestniczyło 458 osób (238 kobiet i 220 mężczyzn), w wieku 21–66 lat. Do oceny wartości zawodowych wykorzystano kwestionariusz „Moja kariera” E. Scheina (w adaptacji A. Paszkowskiej-Rogacz). Analizy statystyczne wykazały istotność relacji między wartościami cenionymi w pracy zawodowej a wiekiem pracowników. Osoby młodsze są zainteresowane przywództwem i podejmowaniem wyzwań. Bezpieczeństwo i stabilizacja to wartości najmocniej cenione przez starsze pokolenie. Rezultaty mają istotne znaczenie w aspekcie dopasowania zawodowego. Uwzględnienie w praktyce organizacyjnej wymiaru podmiotowych wartości ułatwi zachowanie optymalnej równowagi człowiek – środowisko pracy (również w kontekście różnic międzygrupowych).

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