

Understanding Generational Differences in Sport Administration: Creating a Cohesive Work Environment

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Motivation

The purpose of this descriptive study was to explore and determine if generational differences in attitudes existed in the workplace, specifically in the sport industry, among members of the Baby Boomer Generation (1946 and 1964), Generation X (1965 and 1981), and Generation Y (1982 and 2000).

Methods

A mixed-method approach was used to obtain quantitative and qualitative data. The findings are intended to help sport organizations recognize and understand how to manage generational differences in the workforce. Three research questions were addressed: What attitudes and preferences are similar in different generations working in the sport industry? What attitudes and preferences are different between generations working in the sport industry? What efforts are taking place in the sport industry to close the generation gap?

Participants were alumni of a University located in the southeast region of the United States. This institution is known to have one of the first sport-administration programs established both at the undergraduate (1973) and master's level (1977).

A total of 8 questions obtained demographic information from participants, whereas a total of 36 questions used a 5-point Likert scale and focused on the exploration of differences between generational attitudes toward work in the sport industry. Two open-ended questions which addressed research question three provided a qualitative component that focused on communication efforts in the workplace.

Analysis

Appropriate descriptive analysis was used and the Kruskal-Wallis test for one-way ANOVA was used to test the null hypotheses and thereby address the research question.

Additionally, the Tukey method, a post hoc test, was run to compare the means to see where significant differences existed among the generational cohorts. For the qualitative component, the researcher used categorization to analyze and compare major themes that emerged.

Results

The first research question sought to examine the similarities of attitudes of members of each generational cohort working in the sport industry.

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.

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.

The second research question sought to examine the differences of attitudes of the members of each generational cohort working in the sport industry. 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).

A qualitative analysis established emerging themes and trends for research question three. The first open-ended 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.

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.

Implications

Despite one’s generational cohort, using the power of communication in the workplace should be a considered a priority of any organization. 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.

References

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