

January 2011

## Generational Differences in Work Attitudes: Evidence from the Hospitality Industry

David Solnet

*The University of Queensland*, [d.solnet@uq.edu.au](mailto:d.solnet@uq.edu.au)

Anna Kralj

*The University of Queensland*, [null@uq.edu.au](mailto:null@uq.edu.au)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/hospitalityreview>

 Part of the [Business Administration, Management, and Operations Commons](#), [Geriatrics Commons](#), [Hospitality Administration and Management Commons](#), [Human Resources Management Commons](#), and the [Labor and Employment Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Solnet, David and Kralj, Anna (2011) "Generational Differences in Work Attitudes: Evidence from the Hospitality Industry," *Hospitality Review*: Vol. 29 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/hospitalityreview/vol29/iss2/3>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by FIU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Hospitality Review by an authorized administrator of FIU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [dcc@fiu.edu](mailto:dcc@fiu.edu).

---

# Generational Differences in Work Attitudes: Evidence from the Hospitality Industry

## **Abstract**

Our understanding of employee attitudes and their impact on business outcomes has been further complicated in recent years by the newest cohort of service workers. Known as Generation Y (Gen Y), they appear to approach employment in a manner different to that of their predecessors. A review of the academic literature reveals little empirical evidence to support an appropriate understanding of the impact of such difference. This paper provides an overview of a large-scale study into generational differences in employee attitudes and reports on the preliminary data analysis of a survey of over 900 hospitality employees. The most important initial finding from the data analysis is that, on the whole, Gen Y employees have lower scores on those constructs that an organization should be attempting to maximize. Non-Gen Y employees are more satisfied with their jobs, more engaged and more affectively committed to the organization they work for than their Gen Y counterparts, amongst a range of other important constructs. Conversely, Gen Y employees display higher scores on the constructs that an organization would want to minimize in its staff. Gen Y employees are more likely to be planning to quit their jobs, are more likely to perform poorly if their co-workers are doing so, and are also more likely to switch jobs for no particular reason. The discussion covers implications for management as well as directions for future research.

## **Keywords**

Generation Y, millennials, employee attitudes, human resources

# Generational Differences in Work Attitudes: Evidence from the Hospitality Industry

By David Solnet and Anna Kralj

## Abstract

Our understanding of employee attitudes and their impact on business outcomes has been further complicated in recent years by the newest cohort of service workers. Known as Generation Y (Gen Y), they appear to approach employment in a manner different to that of their predecessors. A review of the academic literature reveals little empirical evidence to support an appropriate understanding of the impact of such difference. This paper provides an overview of a large-scale study into generational differences in employee attitudes and reports on the preliminary data analysis of a survey of over 900 hospitality employees. The most important initial finding from the data analysis is that, on the whole, Gen Y employees have lower scores on those constructs that an organization should be attempting to maximize. Non-Gen Y employees are more satisfied with their jobs, more engaged and more affectively committed to the organization they work for than their Gen Y counterparts, amongst a range of other important constructs. Conversely, Gen Y employees display higher scores on the constructs that an organization would want to minimize in its staff. Gen Y employees are more likely to be planning to quit their jobs, are more likely to perform poorly if their co-workers are doing so, and are also more likely to switch jobs for no particular reason. The discussion covers implications for management as well as directions for future research.

*Keywords: Generation Y; millennials; employee attitudes; human resources*

## Introduction

Despite the ever-growing use of technology, human interaction remains a defining characteristic of the hospitality industry. These interactions are inevitably critical to the creation of memorable experiences (good or bad). Managing these interactions and the employees that deliver them is therefore one of the most significant challenges faced by hospitality managers. Exacerbating the demanding task of effective human resource management are the inherent features of employment in the hospitality industry – anti-social working hours, low status, and unclear career paths, to name some of the most frequently cited (Solnet & Hood, 2008). Nevertheless, it is crucial that hospitality managers encourage appropriate “people skills” in their employees: Displaying positive and hospitable behaviors towards customers and working cohesively as a team.

To add to the long-standing list of people-management issues faced by the hospitality industry, there is now the extra challenge of managing a new generation of employee: Generation Y. This group of employees has seemingly caused a profound upset to hospitality operations around the globe, with fundamentally different work attitudes to those previously expected of new entrants to the workforce. As the hospitality industry traditionally relies on young workers (Magd, 2003), the entrance of the Gen Y employee impacts more acutely on hospitality than most other industries.

Gen Y is a popular topic – at the office “water cooler,” on blogs, during management seminars and in trade magazines. As popular as the topic may be, it remains the case that most of the commonly expressed Gen Y characteristics are based on the subjective observations and experiences of older generations, usually managers, teachers and parents. Even a thorough analysis of articles published in peer-reviewed journals reveals contradictory descriptions of Gen Y and their work-related attitudes. Still less helpful for the hospitality industry is the lack of context-specific research investigating the existence and impact of differences in key work-related attitudes and behaviors.

In response to this gap in understanding the contemporary hospitality employee, the authors designed a research project to examine differences in work-related attitudes by generational grouping. A major objective of the research was to provide hospitality owners and managers with practical approaches to improve the attraction, motivation and retention of Gen Y employees. The purpose of this paper is to provide a broad overview of the background, conceptual framework, method, major findings and conclusions of the large-scale study, which included a survey of over 900 hospitality employees.

## **Background**

A *generation*, or a *generational cohort*, is understood as a group of individuals born in the same defined period of years who have been exposed to similar societal and historical life events during critical stages of their formative development (Schaie, 1965). Members of a generation learn similar responses to social and environmental stimuli and develop a shared set of value systems and ways of interpreting events. The external forces that influence the creation of shared value systems differ from one generation to the next, leading to identifiable differences in the way each generation reacts to authority, their work-related values and what they will do to satisfy their values (Gursoy et al., 2008).

Lack of agreement on the defining life events for a generation (for example, regional events that impact some more than others) has led to a

concomitant lack of agreement on the precise start and end years for each generation currently in the hospitality workforce (Gen Y, Gen X and the Baby Boomers). Nevertheless, it is useful for the purposes of categorization to define the period of years that identifies each generation. After an extensive review of numerous sources of generational research, the authors adopted the common middle ground:

- Gen Y: born between 1979 and 1994
- Gen X: born between 1965 and 1978
- Baby Boomers: born between 1945 and 1964

In Australia, as in many developed countries around the world, Gen Y is much larger than the previous generation (Gen X) and is approaching the size of the Baby Boomer cohort (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Kumar & Lim, 2008; McCrindle, 2010; Sutton Bell & Narz; 2007). The impact on the hospitality industry will intensify as Gen Y employees start to make up an increasingly larger percentage of the workforce.

In many different work contexts, the Gen Y employee presents as radically different to previous generations of employees entering the workforce (Solnet & Hood, 2008). These differences are at odds with conventional wisdom on how new entrants to the workplace should think and act. Radical or not, the opinions, attitudes and behaviors of the Gen Y employee are as fundamental in shaping the service orientation of a hospitality business as those of any other employee of the organization. It is therefore of vital importance to understand the attitudes and motivators of Gen Y and how they differ from the attitudes of other generational groups in the workplace.

Although descriptions of the Gen Y employee are often contradictory (Deal et al., 2010; Kowske et al., 2010), there are some traits that are generally cited by most authors. One of these is their demanding nature: constantly seeking performance feedback, new challenges and additional responsibilities (Gursoy et al., 2008; Solnet & Hood, 2008; Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Another is an emphasis on connectivity, communication and collaboration (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Kowske et al., 2010; Solnet & Hood, 2008). Gen Y expects to be listened to and have their opinion valued. This stems from schooling in non-competitive environments that emphasize participation over winning, more involvement in family decisions, and staying at home longer after finishing school (Eisner, 2005; Hill, 2002; Solnet & Hood, 2008; Szamosi, 2006). Solnet & Hood (2008) suggested six propositions related to Gen Y's work-related attitudes, values and behaviors in a hospitality work context. These propositions were largely based on the notion that Gen Y will seek more familial and supportive relationships with

their supervisors and their employing organizations and will respond positively when they find such an environment in which to work.

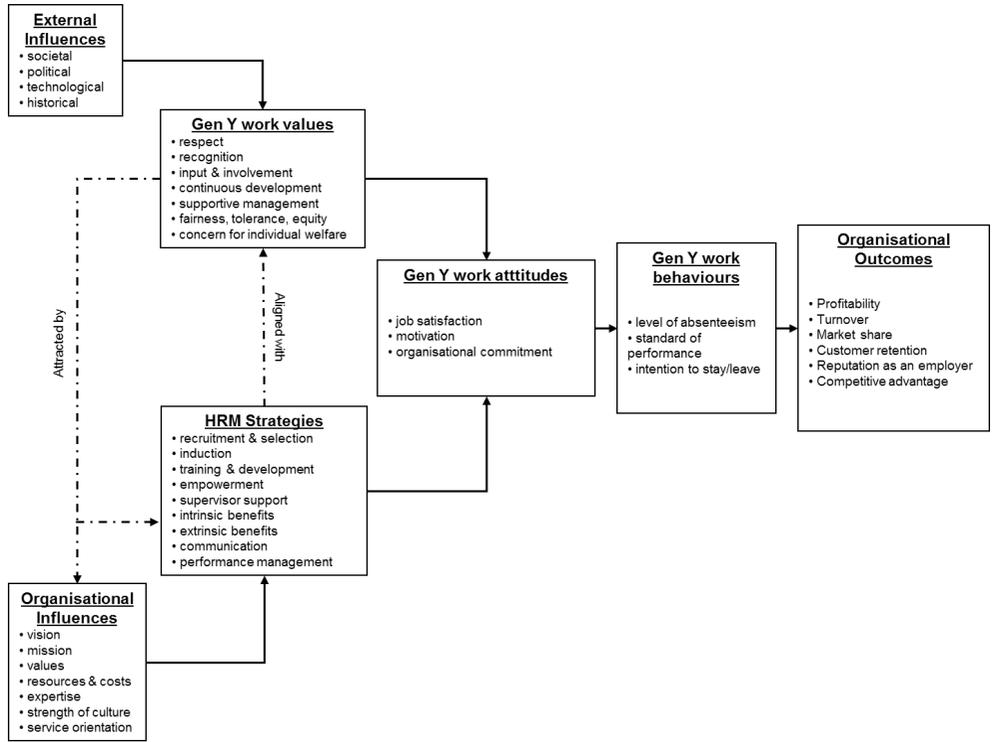
Although there are a handful of empirical studies from the hospitality industry (e.g. Cairncross & Buultjens, 2007; Gursoy et al. 2008), for the most part the findings and recommendations of workplace generational studies center on professional contexts. There is a need to investigate the particular impact of differences in generational attitudes in the specific context of hospitality, as findings from other industries may not be applicable. The few studies that have been conducted in the hospitality industry are qualitative in nature, using small samples and one considers only the perceptions of managers, rather than Gen Y's attitudes. A key objective of the large-scale study reported here is to make recommendations that are directly applicable to the hospitality industry, based on data collected from a large sample of hospitality employees across a range of industry sectors.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The principles of organizational psychology and service management guided the design of this research project. Underpinning the conceptual foundation of the research are such frameworks as the Service-Profit Chain (Heskett et al., 1994) and the linkage research model in service management (Wiley, 1991). The rationale is that the atmosphere internal to an organization exerts a significant influence on the success of a business in achieving its goals. There is growing evidence that there are direct connections between the work environment, as perceived by employees, and important organizational outcomes, such as customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and profitability (cf. Chi & Gursoy, 2009; Nishii et al., 2008; Salanova et al., 2005).

As success in the ever more competitive hospitality environment is dependent on high levels of customer satisfaction (Chi & Gursoy, 2009), positively manipulating the attitudes of employees needs to be a primary focus of managers. The Service-Profit Chain suggests that employee and customer satisfaction are “mirrored” (Heskett et al., 1994). In this line of thinking, the authors developed a conceptual model for the research project, as presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
**The Gen Y research model**



The conceptual model posits that external influences have an impact on Gen Y's work values, which influence Gen Y's work attitudes, and in turn, the behaviors that Gen Y exhibits at work. Ultimately, the outcomes that the employer achieves are affected by Gen Y's work behaviors. Interacting with Gen Y's work-related values and attitudes are the human resource management (HRM) strategies implemented by the organization, which are influenced by internal characteristics of the organization. Organizational characteristics and HRM strategies can attract potential Gen Y employees, if these are in alignment with Gen Y's work values. The dynamic interaction between Gen Y's work values and attitudes and the HRM strategies of the organization will influence Gen Y's work behaviors, with a resulting impact on organizational outcomes.

Through an extensive literature review, the authors identified a range of external influences that were likely impacting on Gen Y's work values. The authors then conducted a series of focus groups with Gen Y

hospitality employees as well as hospitality owners and managers. The focus groups provided further insight into the work values and attitudes of Gen Y. Analysis of literature review and focus group stages informed the development of a survey of employee attitudes, in order to test for significant differences across generational groupings as well as differences in the relationships between important constructs and attitudes. This paper will now report on the broad findings from the survey of hospitality employees before encapsulating the major conclusions and practical recommendations drawn from the overall project. With an improved understanding of generational differences in work-related attitudes, the hospitality industry can work towards improving organizational outcomes through optimal employee management.

### **Survey Method**

For the quantitative stage of this research, the authors conducted a survey of hospitality employees across a range of industry sectors and geographical locations in Queensland, Australia. To solicit participation in the survey, the authors approached hospitality owners and managers across a range of industry sectors, including hotels, restaurants and community clubs. Twenty businesses agreed to participate, from a total of twenty-four that were approached. Employees of these businesses completed the questionnaire during pre-arranged staff meetings and training sessions. In total, 914 hospitality employees responded to the survey. This represents approximately 35% of the total employee population of the participating businesses.

Figure 2 depicts the breakdown of the sample, by gender, generational grouping, industry sector, tenure, position held, and employment status. Despite the convenience sampling approach, an analysis of hospitality labor market demographics gives the researchers reason to believe that the sample characteristics are relatively representative of the hospitality industry in Queensland, Australia.

**Figure 2**  
**Sample characteristics**

Variable	Frequency	%age
[Gender]		
Male	377	41.2
Female	537	58.2
[Generation]		
Y	570	62.3
Not Y	344	37.7
[Sector]		
Hotel	508	55.6
Restaurant	291	31.8
Club	115	12.6
[Tenure]		
Less than 1 year	281	30.7
1 to 5 years	431	47.2
5+ years	202	22.1
[Position]		
Non-supervisory	621	67.9
Supervisor/Manage	293	32.1
[Employment Status]		
Casual	330	36.1
Part-time	193	21.1
Full-time	385	42.1
Contract	6	0.7

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. In the first, respondents were asked to report on some descriptive characteristics, such as age, gender, tenure with current organization, position in organization and employment status. In the main section of the questionnaire, respondents indicated their attitudes (on a scale of 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree”) towards a series of statements designed to capture relevant employee attitudes.

## Measures

All measures included in the survey were adapted from well-established and commonly used scales in top-tier peer-reviewed journals. The measures covered employee attitudes including engagement (May et al., 2004), job satisfaction (Nishii et al., 2009), organizational citizenship behaviors (Podsakoff et al., 1990) organizational commitment (Meyer et al., 1993), perceived organizational and supervisory support (Rhoades et al., 2001), perceived job security (Kraimer et al., 2005), perceived employability (Berntson et al., 2006), intention to quit (Colarelli, 1984) and job switching behaviors (Khatri et al., 2001). Attitudes towards rewards and recognition (Subramony et al., 2008) as well as organizational investments in training and development (Wayne et al., 1997) were also captured.

In accordance with previous applications in the literature (e.g., Berntson et al., 2006; Nishii et al., 2009; Wanous et al., 1997; Wayne et al., 1997), job satisfaction, perceived employability and perceptions of training and development opportunities were each measured using single-item scales. The specific items were “All in all, I am satisfied with my job,” “It would be easy for me to get a new and comparable job,” and “My organization has made a substantial investment in providing formal training and development opportunities,” respectively.

Perceived job security, job switching behaviors and intentions to quit were each measured using three items (examples for each construct included “I will be able to keep my present job as long as I wish,” “To me, switching jobs is kind of fun,” and “I frequently think of quitting my job,” respectively). The affective dimension of organizational commitment was measured using four items. An example is “I sense a strong sense of belonging to my organization.”

Five items were used to measure both perceived supervisory support (example item: “My supervisor really cares about my well-being”) and perceived organizational support (example item: “My organization often asks about my opinions”). Employee engagement and perceptions of rewards and recognition were measured using six items (examples for each of these constructs included “I really put my heart into my job” and “My supervisor praises me when I do a better than average job”). Finally, organizational citizenship behaviors were measured using eleven items adapted from Podsakoff's et al.'s (1990) scale. Example items for this scale included “I obey company rules and regulations even when no one is watching” and “I am always willing to lend a helping hand to others around me.”

## Survey Results

As the first round of questionnaires collected did not exclusively identify the Gen X and Baby Boomer generations (an oversight corrected in subsequent collection rounds), it is not possible to compare across the three generations using the whole sample. Accordingly, the results presented here are based on a comparison of Gen Y and non-Gen Y (i.e., Gen X and Baby Boomers combined) employees. Although this may not be ideal, the authors wish to emphasize again that the objective of this paper is to provide an overview of an extended research project, parts of which will be examined in more detail in subsequent analyses and publications. This paper in part serves to point to future directions for analysis and research in this area.

Independent samples t-tests were used to identify significant differences in the attitudes of Gen Y and non-Gen Y employees. The results are presented in Table 1. As can be seen, there is a significant difference in the attitudes of Gen Y and non-Gen Y employees for every construct with the exception of perceptions of training and development. Evaluating the extent of such differences reveals further interesting results. Every construct that an organization would want to maximize in its employees (e.g., engagement, job satisfaction, organizational commitment), the Gen Y cohort rates significantly lower. The converse is also true. The two constructs that an organization would want to minimize in its staff (job switching behavior and intention to quit), the Gen Y cohort rates significantly higher. Interestingly, Gen Y consider themselves to be more employable than their non-Gen Y counterparts, although the non-Gen Y cohort have a greater sense of job security. Of course, the job security finding would point to the higher rates of part- and full-time employment within the non-Gen Y cohort (81.4%) over the Gen Y cohort (52.3%).

**Figure 3**  
**Independent samples t-tests**

Construct	Gen Y <sup>a</sup>		Non-Gen Y <sup>b</sup>		t-statistic	df	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Engagement	5.41	0.81	5.76	0.76	-6.53	912	.000**
Job satisfaction	5.30	1.28	5.66	1.19	-4.17	912	.000*
OCB	5.49	0.73	5.80	0.72	-6.24	912	.000**
Org. commitment	5.13	1.13	5.56	1.04	-5.71	912	.000**
POS	4.77	0.86	4.98	0.81	-3.64	912	.000**
PSS	5.05	1.12	5.32	1.20	-3.34	912	.001**
Job Security	5.20	1.15	5.40	1.12	-2.58	912	.010*
Employability	4.89	1.45	4.46	1.12	4.01	912	.000**
Intention to Quit	3.54	1.53	2.80	1.42	7.20	912	.000**
Job Switching	2.83	1.26	2.39	1.34	4.95	912	.000**
Rewards & Recognition	4.63	1.24	4.84	1.25	-2.45	912	.000**
Training & Dev	5.07	1.49	5.23	1.48	-1.50	912	.134

<sup>a</sup> n=570 <sup>b</sup> n=344  
 \* p < .05 \*\* p < .01

In this study, the Gen Y cohort spans sixteen years, and the youngest of this generation have only just entered the workforce, while the oldest could have been in the workforce for around ten years. It stands to reason, then, that there could also be significant differences in the attitudes of employees within the Gen Y cohort. Accordingly, the cohort was split into three “waves,” with the oldest being the first wave (born between 1979 and 1983), the middle group becoming the second wave (born between 1984 and 1988), and the youngest Gen Y employees making up the third wave (born between 1989 and 1994). One-way ANOVAs were conducted to determine the existence of any differences in the attitudes of the three Gen Y waves. Significant differences existed in the attitudes of the three waves of Gen Y for the constructs engagement,  $F(2, 567) = 5.501, p < .005$ , organizational commitment,  $F(2, 567) = 6.125, p < .005$ , organizational citizenship behaviors,  $F(2, 567) = 4.954, p < .01$ , PSS,  $F(2, 567) = 11.828, p < .001$ , POS,  $F(2, 567) = 6.791, p < .005$ , job security,  $F(2, 567) = 11.198, p < .001$ , employability,  $F(2, 567) = 3.517, p < .05$ , and job switching behaviors  $F(2, 567) = 6.786, p < .005$ . That is to say, no differences existed in the attitudes of the three Gen Y waves regarding job satisfaction  $F(2, 567) = 0.640, p = .528$ , quit intentions,  $F(2, 567) = 2.736, p = .066$ , perceptions of training and development,  $F(2, 567) = 0.390, p = .677$ , and rewards and recognitions,  $F(2, 567) = 1.429, p = .240$ .

Post hoc tests (Tukey’s HSD) revealed that the major source of difference was between the third wave (the youngest employees) and the second and first waves (the older employees). Again, the youngest wave had less positive perceptions of those things an organization would want to have

good perceptions of (e.g., job satisfaction, engagement, etc.) and more inclination to engage in the behaviors an organization would want to minimize, i.e., quit intentions and job-switching behaviors.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The preliminary analysis of the quantitative data from an extended study of generational differences in attitudes reveals that there are indeed significant differences in all but one key work-related attitude. This simple finding itself should be of key concern to hospitality owners and managers. Although a single point in time study such as this one cannot definitively prove the existence of stable and continuous generational effects, immediate attention must be paid to the existence of significantly different attitudes and opinions regarding some of the important internal drivers of external business outcomes.

Perception of training and development opportunities was the only measure with no significant differences in the attitudes of different generations. A closer inspection of this finding reveals that both the Gen Y and non-Gen Y group rated this construct at approximately 5 (out of a possible 7). While this is a positive attitude towards training and development in general, it is only slightly higher than the neutral attitude (at 4 on the scale). Providing opportunities for training and development can benefit a company in many ways: Employees can develop and improve on the required set of skills to effectively deliver the highest levels of service quality and customer satisfaction, and revenues can increase through improved confidence and up-selling. The investment makes employees feel valued by their organization, encouraging them to reciprocate in kind. For the hospitality businesses that participated in this survey, there is a long way to go in terms of improving training and development opportunities for their staff, of all generations.

This same finding is true of all the indicators of employee attitudes. Although the non-Gen Y cohort rates consistently and significantly higher than the Gen Y cohort in their positive attitudes, the level for both groups is still a long way from the possible rating of 7. As employee perceptions of the work environment are directly linked with desirable organizational outcomes, such as customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and profitability (cf. Chi & Gursoy, 2009; Nishii et al., 2008; Salanova et al., 2005), hospitality owners and managers must constantly seek to provide the best possible working environment in the eyes of their employees.

Long-term profitability and sustainability in the hospitality industry are largely dependent on customer satisfaction (Chi & Gursoy, 2009). Customers will often equate service quality with the employee that delivered the service (Schneider & Bowen, 1985). Through the interactional nature of service delivery, the internal HR practices of an organization become

“visible” to the customer (Tornow & Wiley, 1991). It is not enough to focus on revenues, costs and profitability targets; understanding and improving the impact of internal processes on employee attitudes is an integral part of business success.

### **Implications for management**

By integrating the results of all stages of the larger study (literature review, focus groups and large-scale survey), the authors are able to make some suggestions for effective people management that are directly relevant to hospitality operations. Some of the suggestions are directly applicable to the management of Gen Y employees, and some are general suggestions for balancing the needs of various generations in the workplace. First and foremost, it is more important than ever before to hire the right person; skills are important but there is a need to ensure that the potential Gen Y candidate’s values align with those of the business. Once hired, the orientation and socialization of the new Gen Y employee to the business is crucial. If they are made to feel comfortable and like part of the family from early on, they are likely to reciprocate with commitment and loyalty to their co-workers and to the business.

Employee engagement is one of the most important drivers of positive business outcomes, such as increased customer satisfaction and revenues (Schneider et al., 2009). Involving Gen Y employees in how and why the business operates, rather than just asking them to follow instructions, will be well received. One example of this could be offering attractive opportunities to experience the business as a customer would. Positive co-worker relationships, trust and collaboration inspire the Gen Y employee; building a company culture that supports these things is important. Hospitality organizations that do not already have one should develop a statement of “values” and actively and openly uphold these in practice. Employee attitude surveys are a useful tool for keeping abreast of the tide of opinions within an organization.

So often, easy opportunities for providing learning and growth opportunities in hospitality go ignored. While formal training programs are obviously beneficial, not all businesses can afford them for their staff. Such smaller operators should focus on what they can do, by passing on their valuable insight and experience to less experienced staff. One simple example could be by involving front-line employees in the stock-ordering process. Mentoring is an excellent opportunity for Gen Y employees to learn from their older counterparts. This not only develops relationships and provides learning opportunities for the mentee, but also affords the mentor the chance to learn valuable new skills.

Anecdotally, the authors are aware of a lot of resistance to new technological platforms, mobile communication in particular. Hospitality operators are encouraged to embrace these technologies and turn the challenge into an advantage: Vacant shifts could be advertised through a Facebook page, or important company announcements (shortened to the Gen Y “language”) could be sent out via SMS. Banning the use of phones and other mobile gadgetry in the workplace is fast becoming an archaic practice. Operators should think instead about developing reasonable guidelines for the use of such devices during work hours. A corollary to the increasing reliance on mobile technologies is that face-to-face communication skills do not come as naturally to this generation as one might assume. Role play training, where employees get a chance to see what good customer service “looks like,” would be of great benefit.

Effective people management will require more flexibility on the part of the organization, manager and supervisor than previously (Tulgan, 2004). This may mean offering different benefits, rewards and working hours to different employees depending on what suits the employees, rather than the manager. Above all, managers need to recognize and respect the individuality of each and every employee (regardless of generation). A “one size fits all” approach is not going to work into the future. For all their desire to follow trends, collaborate, and stay intricately connected to their peers, Gen Y also strongly values their own individuality and freedom of expression.

### **Study Limitations**

Perhaps the most relevant question regarding generational differences in attitudes relates to how enduring the traits are. Will the attitudes and subsequent behaviors that Gen Y now displays be stable and continuous over the years to come? Will Gen Y continue to demand individualized attention, new challenges and regular feedback? Of course, it is not possible to determine this from a single point time study such as this one. Naturally there are certain other limitations of this study that must be acknowledged. While the study benefited from a large sample size across a diverse range of hospitality business in different geographic locations across Queensland, Australia, the authors recognize that this sample may not be representative of hospitality employees in other areas of the world.

There are many other possible considerations that could moderate or affect the results of this type of research program. It is rather difficult to fully disentangle the reasons why and the ways how generations differ, as differences between individuals could be the result of many factors that are unrelated to generational grouping. For example, there is the idea of a “life cycle” effect, whereby young people today become more like today’s older people as they mature into older life. Then there is the “period” effect, in

which all generations are affected by a major world event, but the way in which they are affected is quite different as they are different formative stages in their lives (Kowske et al., 2010).

## Implications for Future Research

As emphasized in previous sections, this paper provides a broad overview of an extended program of research into generational differences in work-related attitudes in the hospitality workplace. The objective of this paper was to introduce the reader to the background, rationale and conceptual model for the study, before summarizing the broad findings from the large-scale survey of hospitality employees and providing some suggestions for how management might deal with the implications of the findings. Naturally, the size of the data set collected by means of the survey lends itself to an extended program of statistical analysis. In this regard, the authors are already in the process of conducting various statistical analyses to further investigate important relationships between the constructs of interest.

Further analyses must control for the effect of organizational tenure, position and employment status, amongst other potentially confounding factors. Preliminary analyses of the dataset before all data collection finished indicated that the effect of generational grouping was much stronger than other factors, although it is necessary to conduct such analyses again on the full dataset. It was beyond the scope, limits and relevance of the current paper to report such results here. Another angle the authors are investigating is the moderating effect of employability and job security on employee attitudes and relationships between constructs. Given the turbulent economic circumstances of recent years, this is an important area for further analysis.

In this study, differences in *levels* of attitudes across generations have been empirically established in support of the abundant popular press and anecdotal evidence. Going forward, it is important to understand the nature of *relationships* between the key attitudes and whether these relationships differ across generations. For example, is the impact of perceived organizational or supervisory support on employee engagement stronger for Gen Y employees than non-Gen Y employees? The propositions developed by Solnet & Hood (2008) support this line of thinking. Further data analysis will shed light on questions such as these.

Future studies could examine the effect of various leadership styles, management approaches or human resource practices on the attitudes of different generations. For example, in the human resource literature there is a widely cited gap in understanding the mechanisms that link human resource practices with subsequent employee attitudes and behaviors. It is generally accepted *why* human resource practices lead to particular behaviors and outcomes, but it not so well understood *how* such practices influence

behaviors. There is a growing argument that the way in which human resource practices are perceived by individual employees is an important factor (Nishii et al., 2009). It is likely, then, that such perceptions would vary across generations. This warrants further investigation.

Some of the limitations referred to above could be overcome in future research through strata sampling in multiple countries and repeated measure, longitudinal research designs. The only way to control for age, period and generation effects in a single study is to adopt the age-period-cohort (APC) model (cf. Mason et al., 1973), although even this method has its limitations surrounding the linear dependencies between age, period and cohort (Kowske et al., 2010).

In closing, just as those who market products and services must remember that they are not the customer, managers must remember that they are not the ones serving a great majority of customers. Strategies for managing employees must be tailored to suit the employee, not the preferences of the manager. People with open minds and the energy and drive to satisfy the variety of workplace demands made by today's employees will steer the businesses that succeed in the ever more competitive hospitality environment. Never resting on their laurels, such hospitality leaders and managers will be constantly monitoring the changing attitudes of successive generations of their workers.

## References

- Berntson, E., Sverke, M. & Marklund, S. (2006). Predicting perceived employability: Human capital or labor market opportunities? *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 27(2), 223-244.
- Cairncross, G., & Buultjens, J. (2007). Generation Y and work in the tourism and hospitality industry: Problem? What problem? *Centre for Enterprise Development and Research*, Occasional Paper No. 9.
- Cennamo, L., & Gardner, D. (2008). Generational differences in work values, outcomes and person-organization values fit. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23(8), 891-906.
- Chi, C. G., & Gursoy, D. (2009). Employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and financial performance: An empirical examination. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 28(2), 245-253.
- Colarelli, S. M. (1984). Methods of communication and mediating processes in realistic job previews. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 69(4), 633-642.
- Deal, J., Altman, D., & Rogelberg, S. (2010). Millennials at work: What we know and what we need to do (if anything). *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 25(2), 191-199.
- Eisner, S. P. (2005). Managing Generation Y..S.A.M. *Advanced Management Journal*, 70(4), 4-15.
- Gursoy, D., Maier, T.A., & Chi, C.G. (2008). Generational differences: an examination of work values and generational gaps in the hospitality workforce. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 27(3), 448-458.
- Heskett, J. L., Jones, T. O., Loveman, G. W., Sasser Jr., W. E., & Schlesinger, L. A. (1994, March-April). Putting the service-profit chain to work. *Harvard Business Review*, 164-170.
- Hill, R. P. (2002). Managing across generations in the 21st century: Important lessons from the ivory trenches. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 11(1), 60-66.
- Howe, N., & Strauss, W. (2000). *Millennials rising: The next great generation*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Khatri, N., Fern, C. T., & Budhwar, P. (2001). Explaining employee turnover in an Asian context. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 11(1), 54-74.
- Kowske, B., Rasch, R., & Wiley, J. (2010). Millennials' (lack of) attitude problem: An empirical examination of generational effects on work attitudes. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 25(2), 265-279.

- Kumar, A., & Lim, H. (2008). Age differences in mobile service perceptions: comparison of Generation Y and baby boomers. *Journal of Services Marketing, 22*(7), 568-577.
- Kraimer, M. L., Wayne, S. J., Liden, R. C., & Sparrowe, R. T. (2005). The role of job security in understanding the relationship between employees' perceptions of temporary workers and employees' performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90*(2), 389-398.
- Magd, H. (2003). Management attitudes and perceptions of older employees in hospitality management. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 15*(7), 393-401.
- Mason, K.O., Mason, W.H., Winsborough, H.H., & Poole, K. (1973). Some methodological issues in cohort analysis of archival data. *American Sociological Review, 38*, 242-258.
- May, D. R., Gilson, R. L., & Harter, L. M. (2004). The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work. *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology, 77*(1), 11-37.
- McCrindle Research. (2010). *Snapshot: Australia approaching 'peak labor'*. Retrieved from <http://www.mccrindle.com.au/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=68075&A=SearchResult&SearchID=984506&ObjectID=68075&ObjectType=6>
- Meyer, J. P., Allen, N. J., & Smith, C. A. (1993). Commitment to organizations and occupations: Extension and test of a three-component conceptualization. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 78*(4), 538-551.
- Nishii, L. H., Lepak, D. P., & Schneider, B. (2008). Employee attributions of the "why" of HR practices: Their effects on employee attitudes and behaviors, and customer satisfaction. *Personnel Psychology, 61*(3), 503-545.
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Moorman, R. H., & Fetter, R. (1990). Transformational leader behaviors and their effects on followers' trust in leader, satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors. *The Leadership Quarterly, 1*(2), 107-142.
- Rhoades, L., Eisenberger, R., & Armeli, S. (2001). Affective commitment to the organization: The contribution of perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*(5), 825-836.
- Salanova, M., Agut, S., & Peiró, J. M. (2005). Linking organizational resources and work engagement to employee performance and customer loyalty: the mediation of service climate. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90*(6), 1217-1227.
- Schaie, K.W. (1965). A general model for the study of development problems. *Psychological Bulletin, 64*, 92-107.

- Schneider, B., & Bowen, D.E. (1985). Employee and customer perceptions of service in banks: Replication and extension. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 70(3), 423-433.
- Schneider, B., Macey, W.H., Barbera, K.M., & Martin, N. (2009). Driving customer satisfaction and financial success through employee engagement. *People & Strategy*, 32(2), 22-27.
- Solnet, D., & Hood, A. (2008). Generation Y as hospitality employees: Framing a research agenda. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Management*, 15(4), 59-68.
- Subramony, M., Krause, N., Norton, J. & Burns, G. N. (2008). The relationship between human resource investments and organizational performance: A firm-level examination of equilibrium theory. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(4), 778-788.
- Sutton Bell, N., & Narz, M. (2007). Meeting the challenges of age diversity in the workplace. *The CPA Journal*, 77(2), 56-59.
- Szamosi, L. T. (2006). Just what are tomorrow's SME employees looking for? *Education + Training*, 48(8/9), 654-663.
- Tornow, W.W., & Wiley, J. W. (1991). Service quality and management practices: a look at employee attitudes, customer satisfaction and bottom-line consequences. *Human Resource Planning*, 14(2), 105-115.
- Tulgan, B. (2004). Trends point to a dramatic generational shift in the future workforce. *Employment Relations Today*, 30(4), 23-31.
- Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, S. M. (2008). Generational differences in psychological traits and their impact on the workplace. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23(8), 862-877.
- Wanous, J. P., Reichers, A. E., & Hudy, M. J. (1997). Overall job satisfaction: How good are single-item measures? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82(2), 247-252.
- Wayne, S. J., Shore, L. M., & Liden, R. C. (1997). Perceived organizational support and leader-member exchange: A social exchange perspective. *Academy of Management Journal*, 40(1), 82-111.
- Wiley, J.W. (1991). Customer satisfaction: A supportive work environment and its financial cost. *Human Resource Planning*, 14(2), 117-127.

**David Solnet** is Hospitality Management Program Director, School of Tourism, University of Queensland; **Anna Hood** is Associate Lecturer, School of Tourism, University of Queensland.