RE-DEFINING GENERATIONAL GAPS IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORK, LIFE, CAREER AND THE WORLD: PERSPECTIVES RECOMMENDATIONS ON RECRUITMENT PRACTICES IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Workforce demographics evolve significantly from era-to-era and from nation-to-nation. Presently, there are Three generations that are globally defined as identifiable groups (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y. A.K.A Millennials). While individuals in different generations are diverse, they nevertheless share certain thoughts, values and behaviours because of the shared birth years and overlapping events. Though, considered in the Malaysian social context, the identifiable generations labels may my not hold true as life events vary across countries; Baby Boomers from the Western nations are so called because of the numerous births which occurred in the decade or so after the Second World War as prosperity returned to those economies (O'Bannon, 2001), whereas in Malaysia at that time the opposite scenario occurred (low in fertility rate). According to the latest census, the fertility rates have been highest during the most recent decades. While workforce demographics have received significant attention in the literature, little attention has been paid to the effective recruitment practices targeting specific subgroups of the Malaysian workforce population by generation. This study attempts to re-define the generational gaps by examining the attitudes towards work, life, career and world values of respondents across regions in Malaysia. The results revealed that definitions regarding identifiable generational groups were found to vary across the respondent groups. In this paper, the three re-definitions of the Malaysian workforce are described, generational differences and similarities are identified, and implications for recruitment efforts are discussed. Lastly, this study establishes the legitimacy of intergenerational differences as an important social categorisation variable in Malaysian recruitment efforts.

Keywords: generation gaps, generational labelling, baby boomer, generation X &Y, recruitment practices

INTRODUCTION

Present workforce demographics have evolved significantly from era-to-era and nation-to-nation. Today’s workplaces have become generational melting pots where trends such as dual income career couples, delayed retirement for older workers and increased longevity mean that the age spectrum of workers in the workforce is wider now than ever before. Most demographic experts would generally point to three generations that are active globally, as definable groups in our current workforce: Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y (which some refer to as Millennials) – the newest addition on the corporate
ladder. The differences among these identifiable groups go well beyond the shared birthday years and events. Demographic experts maintain that each generational cohort has been shaped by unique historical, social, cultural events; thus, each has distinct preferences and share certain thoughts, values and behaviours. In addition, as a result of these differences each generation responds to different sets of motivators and rewards and seeks to derive varying experiences and benefits from their careers from a human resources perspective.

Different generations of workers tend to bring different priorities and values towards their work, life, career and even in their world view, but companies should be wary of embracing too many demographic stereotypes. For instance, generational profiles provide broad outlines that can be useful in trying to encourage intergenerational understanding and cooperation rather than as a means to jumping to conclusions solely on the basis generational identity. While it helps to be aware of generational attributes, keeping in mind that even when supported by extensive surveys and research, these traits are, at best, generalizations, for each group, while tending to share similarities is, after all made up of millions of individuals, who can be expected to differ from one another. Generational theory was first popularised in the United States in 1960s and since then it has been picked up quickly by the media in much of the Western world. The result is the labelling of tags “Baby Boomer”, “Generation X” and “Gen Y” based on a group of birth years and life events that separate the groups has been widely accepted and used globally (Codrington, 2011). However, a closer look is warranted, because these categories may not apply in countries like Malaysia. The phrase Baby Boomer from the Western nations has been referred to a noticeable temporary increase in the birth rate during the period following World War II (O'Bannon, 2001). However, in Malaysia during the post-World War II era was, in fact, the opposite, and was characterized by lower birth rates and low fertility rate by comparison. With this caveat in mind, the purpose of this study is to look into the role of Malaysian workforce demographics and investigate the validity of the globally defined groups to examine if the concepts indeed fit in relation Malaysian society. This study also attempts to re-define the generational gap by examining the attitudes towards work, life, career and world values of respondents across regions in Malaysia that can help the human resource recruiters to develop a greater awareness of the characteristics of the a multigenerational workforce and take better advantage of the varied perspectives and talents each group brings into the workplace.

**Background to the study**

**A. The generational categories**

At the turn of millennium, the present workforce is the most diversified in terms of generations, culture and values. Therefore, it is common that the values and expectations towards work and careers, even worldviews will differ among generations (Glass, 2007). The term ‘generation’ brings with a variety of definitions and meanings. Portes and DeWind (2008) offer the term generation as being composed of two distinct contexts. In a kinship context, the term generation can be referred as a stage in a natural succession comprising those who are of the same genealogical family ancestry, such as the generations of parents, grandchildren and so on. In another context, it is also widely used as a synonym for cohort, where the term is often preferred by demography experts to refer to a set of people born at the same period of time, for instance in some span of time. The most widely popularised and accepted recent study in this area is the work done by William Strauss and Neil Howe (1992), American sociologists whose groundwork theory is known as the Strauss-Howe Generational Theory, was published in On Generations: The History of America’s Future, 1584 to 2069 and launched a subsequent series of books. Their theory is based on two assumptions. The first assumption regards what they call the *socialisation hypothesis*, which suggests that individual adults values were formed during their childhood and the early teenage years and that these values stay relatively constant throughout their life. The second assumption regards what they call *social constructivist theory*, which considers the importance of how an individual’s reality is socially constructed by individuals and groups engaged in social interactions. The authors identified that a generation tends to be about 20 years apart. Generational theory was first popularised in the USA and was quickly picked up by the
media in much of the Western world. Parry and Urwin (2011) cited the early work of Strauss and Howe (1992) and noted that the standard approach across Western world especially in the USA, UK and Australia has been to assume that there are now three generations at play in the workforce (Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y). The labelling is now widely used across the globe - if not always correctly understood. Table 1 summarises the generational characteristics of the groups.

**Table 1: Generational Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Baby Boomers</th>
<th>Generation X</th>
<th>Generation Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>Prosperity/Booming</td>
<td>Downsizing</td>
<td>Capitalism rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core values</td>
<td>Idealistic and individuality</td>
<td>Pessimistic and diversity</td>
<td>Positive and globalised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other name</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Baby Buster, 13th-Generation</td>
<td>Net-Generation, Millennial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table summarised from Strauss and Howe (1992, 2007)*

The precise definition of these cohorts, in terms of years in which they were born, exhibits some variation between studies on this topic. However, in each case the grouping of individuals within these three generations is motivated by the belief that they each share a different set of values and attitudes, as a result of shared events, general historical contexts and experiences. The following discusses a brief summary of each generational cohort.

**Baby Boomers** - The phrase “baby boom” has been used since the late 19th century and refers to a noticeable increase in the birth rate post World War II. Baby boomers make up the largest percentage of today’s active workforce due to prolonged life expectancy, although some might have opted to retire early. Unlike their more traditionalist parents, Boomers grew up during much healthier economic times and have a more optimistic outlook on life as well as work (Beek, 2011). Codrington (2011) wrote that boomers are the post war generation who grew up during the time of grand political and social reform visions and can be characterized by the 1960’s expression: “Sex, Drugs and Rock- and-Roll!” to indicate the generation’s commitment to hedonism in youth. The author notes that the 1960s and 70s were a turbulent time especially for young adult Boomers who went to university and rebelled against the draft (conscription into the military) and initiated the anti-Vietnam war movement. These young adult Boomers were simultaneously being culturally and socially revolutionised partly due to entertainment mediums such as TV, the recording/radio industries and Hollywood, which provided shared cultural experiences worldwide, especially in the West. In terms of shared characteristics of Boomers, they were shaped by the optimistic economic outlook and idealistic visions; they saw job and career as an expression of self-interest and a path to personal fulfillment to finance their personal lives - more than just to get it by (Beek, 2011). McDonald (2008) added that generally the Boomers are ambitious, career-oriented and accustomed to intense competition for jobs and desire to remain connected to the workforce and make intellectual contributions as they near retirement age. A number of qualitative studies had conducted to provide in-depth analysis of generation cohorts. Gursoy, Maier and Chi (2008) examine the characteristics that defined each generation and found that the biggest differences were in their attitudes towards authority and their perceived importance of work in their lives. Their findings supported the common stereotypes around the belief that Baby Boomers *lived to work* and respected hierarchy and authority in the workplace and were resistant to change or to learning new things. Chen and Choi (2008) used a cross-sectional survey to look at generational differences in work
values also found that Baby Boomers were high on altruism and viewed intellectual stimulation more highly than other generation cohorts.

Generation X commonly known as Gen X, it is said that the term was first used by a photographer by the name of Robert Capa in early 1950s that captioned a photo-essay about young men and women growing up immediately after the World War II. However, the conventional and current use of the term is said to have been popularised by American Novelist, Douglas Coupland, who wrote the novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* that actually caught the attention of the broader population and people began to use the term to describe the generation born after the Baby Boomers and began to reach adulthood in the early 1980s. (Wikipedia, 2013). In the United States, Generation X correlates with Thirteeners, which are the thirteenth generation under the American flag and Constitution. Some were called the generation the “Baby Busters” because this generation’s fertility rate dropped dramatically compared to their parents, as more of them held off on marriage, childrearing and concentrated more on careers – both men and women (Strutton, Pelton, and Ferrell, 1997; Martin and Prince, 2008). The unique social characteristics of Generation X are said to be cynicism, media savvy-ness, and pessimism (Montana and Petit, 2008). It is also noted that this group is the first group have been witnesses in great numbers of divorce of their parents. Many have a self-satisfied sense of superiority and a strong love of caffeine (Tsui, 2001; Toronto Star, 2006). Codrington (2011) writes that this cohort experienced an era of crises, from Watergate, Cold War and Vietnam, to the energy crisis and collapse of Communism plus the terrorist’s attacks. Early Gen X university graduates found difficulties finding jobs in a depressed economy, and as the decade of the 1980s and 90s wore on, good paying factory jobs began to disappear, and a higher education became necessary to maintain a middle class lifestyle. It is perhaps then not surprising that studies claim Generation X is the best-educated generation based on college and university enrolments. This level of education is often positively correlated with computer usage (Mitchell, McLean and Turner, 2005). They are often credited with moving the Internet into the mainstream (Reisenwitz and Iyer, 2009). Empirical evidence on generational differences was carried out by Gursoy et al (2008), and this group of researchers found that Generation X responded to instant gratification, worked to live and expected to be rewarded quickly for good work rather than waiting in line for promotions. Unlike the Baby Boomers, the world of long-term stability in a single business was not an option as many large firms began to shutter operations in the West and move across the globe. They enjoyed flexible work hours and independence compared to the counterpart’s generations. A study done by Kunreuther (2003) also found that Generation X is concerned more about work/life balance than other generations. In line with general beliefs regarding Generation X, as Codrington (2011) claimed; this generation "need options and flexibility; they dislike close supervision, preferring freedom and an output-driven workplace. They love change so much they actually pursue it. Xers [Generation X] strive for balance in their lives – they want to have a life; they don't live to work. They want rules but from the right authorities only; the “now” matters more than their future; they don't want to know "Is it true?” rather they want to know "Does it work?"”(p. 6)

Generation Y also called the “Net” (Internet) generation or Millennium generation is the largest young adult and teen segment in the world; they are mostly the children of Baby Boomers. The phrase Generation Y is said to have been coined in 1993 by an Advertising Age editorial section that sought to describe teens of the day (Reed, 2007). This group witnessed their parents lose their jobs after years of loyal service, as a result, they are more potentially apt to leave their careers after two or three years as compared previous generations (Montana and Petit, 2008). They are living in an age of globalisation and unprecedented diversity and have the most exposure to other cultures compared to preceding generations (Codrington, 2011). They typically value autonomy and reinforcement in their jobs, as well as workplaces that are designed to be more informal, fun and open. Because this generation grew up with technology such as personal computers, cell phones and myriad other electronic devices, they tend to be highly proficient with technology (McDonald, 2008; Montana and Petit, 2008). Evans and Forbes (2006) called this generation “digital natives” who are techno savvy, eager that that work be both enjoyable and challenging. On the negative side, this generation has been characterised as over-stimulated and hooked on instant gratification...
and has also been accused of having a sense of entitlement and unreasonable expectations about work. Like the previous Generation X, Generation Y professionals are more likely to put personal pursuits before career and very much desire flexible schedules that will help them achieve the balance they seek (Beek, 2011; McDonald, 2008). Additionally, Durkin (2008) and Hira (2007) both noted that this generation is far less loyal to their employers than previous generations. One commonly found reason is that even though they have strong aspirations for job growth and success, they are not fully engaged in their workplaces and feel compelled to leave one position for another to achieve their potential. Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins (2007) and Cennamo and Gardner (2008) used the Schwartz Values Survey to access differences in values between generations and their results, coincidentally, supported the view of generation Y as valuing autonomy very highly and seek out work-life balance plus they value freedom-related matters more highly than previous generations.

B. The comparison of the social demographics of Malaysia and the USA

The three globally defined groups (Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y) have been widely accepted in most parts of the world, including Malaysia. It is the author’s belief that applying these generational labels in the Malaysian social context might not truly reflect and represent the the situation in Malaysia (or other parts of Asia as well). For societies that have not gone through the same population transition as western societies, there is an imperative need to look into the applicability of applying the same generational labels as the western societies.

In Malaysia: Britain ruled over Malaya until 1941 when the Japanese invaded and captured Singapore in early 1942. Japan occupied British Malaya and much of Asia until losing the war in 1945. It was only after World War II, after Japanese occupation ended, that Malaya became an independent state. An anti-colonial movement and a period of unrest, known as the Emergency, which was driven by a desire for self-determination had been brewing since the late forty’s and lasted for a period extending from 1948 and did not rest until 1960. The event of World War II and its aftermath brought the end of British rule. Peninsular Malaysia became an independent nation called Malaya in 1957; however, it is not until the early 1960, that the term "Malaysia" came into being after Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak elected to join Malaya in a federal union. World War II was a particularly difficult time for the people of Malaya. Even after Independence, the turmoil continued. Soong (2011) describes the state of the Malaysian economy as being largely unchanged from its colonial pattern showing great regional disparities – an urbanized largely non-Malay west coast and a neglected Malay peasant economy along the east coast. Agriculture took up almost 50% of the GDP, and 60 per cent of the labour force, predominantly Malay, were concentrated in the agricultural sector. Although the First and Second Malayan Plans (1956 to 1965) stimulated economic growth during a short boom period, it was later interrupted in May 1969 with ethnic riots and political crisis (Codrington, 2011; EH.net, 2010). While some western Countries like the USA and other parts of western societies where going through the “Baby Boom” era, Malaysia was struggling for its independence and beginning a new era of developing society.

In the USA: The end of World War II brought a baby boom to many countries in the Western countries especially in the USA. When the World War II ended, millions of veterans returned to their homes and re-integrated into civilian life. The US Congress passed the G.I. Bill of Rights that encouraged home ownership and investment in higher education through the distribution of loans at low or no interest rates to veterans. With the benefits, many veterans were getting married, starting families, pursuing higher education and buying their first homes. Young veterans found new homes in planned communities on the outskirts of American cities. Now thriving on the “American Dream”, life was simple, jobs were plentiful, strong unions promoted wage gains, and a record number of babies were born. The baby boom triggered a housing boom, consumption boom and a boom in the labour force (History, 2013; U.S. history, n.d).
Between 1940 and 1960, the GDP for the middle class grew as even many factory jobs paid high wages, came with health insurance and pensions. Furthermore, this increase led to suburbanisation together with the increased ownership of cars in the 1950s and 1960s (Farley and Haag, 2005). In the 1950s, it was coined as years of innocence. Instances such as movie matinee were only 35 cents on the West Coast and drive-in theater became part of the young-family social scene, primarily owing to cheap tickets. By 1955, boomers were enjoying after-school sports and popular TV shows aimed at children; it was a generation reared with television. Popular TV shows, like I Love Lucy show were unique, and bought entertainment to most Americans. Yong and Guy (2006) wrote that American boomers grew up in an era of “prosperity and optimism and [were] bolstered by the sense that they are a special generation capable of changing the world, have equated work with self-worth, contribution and personal fulfillment”.

Population: As it was noted that the historical events occurring during the period when baby boomers where born in the United States, were actually quite different in Malaysia. Malaysia was in the process of becoming an independent state. Some of the available data does give a good indication of the population trends, in Malaysia, during the same time period. The following Population Pyramids (as shown in Figure 1) in 1950 makes the age distribution of the population in Malaysia as compared to the United States quite obvious.

![Population Pyramids](image-url.com)

United States  
Malaysia

Source: Population Pyramids, n.d

**Figure 1:** Population pyramids for Malaysian and the United states in 1950

In 1950, the population of the United States, between the ages of 10 and 20 is smaller than the previous age group (20 – 29 age groups) and also smaller than the next age group between the ages of 0 and 9. That period corresponds to the baby boom period. When examining the Malaysian age distribution for the same period, it is evident that the growth has been continuous. It is possible to infer that there has been no decline in births for a certain period which was followed by the boom as was the case for the United States. It is thus also possible to infer that the term “baby boom” cannot have the same implications and significance in both populations.

**Methodology**

The current study is an attempt to examine the validity of the globally defined generational groups (cohorts) if the concepts indeed fit in relation to Malaysian society. This study also deals with the re-defining the generational gap by examining the attitudes towards work, life, career and world values of respondents’ collective opinions surveyed across regions in Malaysia. In this study, an open-ended questionnaire was collected from 80 employed individuals in a varied age group (20 to 56 year olds) of varying demographics.
across five cities in Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh, Kota Bharu and Johor Bharu) to determine the respondent’s attitudes towards work, life, career and world views. In order to record and analyse the results, the researcher used qualitative descriptive methodology to collect the qualitative data. The data was analysed using a coding method. The data obtained from the 80 respondents was analysed by sorting the opinions into specific response categories and grouping them into common themes and repeated words and phrases. A conceptual framework of this study was developed in order to better illustrate the model used for this study. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that the conceptual framework serves several purposes: (a) identifying who will and will not be included in the study; (b) describing what relationships may be present based on logic, theory and/or experience; and (c) providing the researcher with the opportunity to gather general constructs into intellectual “bins” (Miles & Huberman, p. 18). The conceptual framework Figure 2 serves as an anchor for the study.

![Conceptual Framework](image)

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**Figure 2.** Theoretical framework for the study

In order to examine the generational gap as previously stated, the following questions will be investigated from the 80 respondents: (a) how different are today’s employed individuals (present three generations that in the Malaysian workforce) in terms of their mindset or perspective about work, life, career and the worldview? (b) What are the key generational characteristics differences between Malaysia and the United States (c) In terms of recruitment practices, what adjustments or adaptations should any enterprise (regardless private or public agency) HR managers and recruiters should make to enhance the effectiveness of their recruitment efforts?

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**FINDINGS & RESULTS**

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the profile of surveyed respondents across the five cities in Malaysia. Originally, 150 surveys were given out, however, 80 people responded. The sample included varying demographics across five cities in Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh, Kota Bharu and Johor Bharu). Of the 80 surveyed respondents, about 6 percent were 53 years old or older (born in between 1943 and 1960), a large percentage (79%) of the respondents were in their 40s or early 30s (born in between 1961 and 1981). Finally, approximately fifteen percent were those who were born after 1982. Breaking the sample down according to gender, 61 (76%) respondents were adult males and 19 (23%) were adult females. The largest sample came from Penang which recorded 28 respondents (35%), 23 respondents (29%) were from Kuala Lumpur, 17 respondents (21%) were from Johor Bharu, 10 respondents (13%) from Ipoh and 2 respondents (2%) were from Kota Bharu.
TABLE 2: PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation Age Group</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1943 - 1960</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur (1)</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Penang (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Johor Bharu (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1961 - 1981</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur (18)</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Penang (22)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ipoh (7)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kota Bharu (2)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Johor Bharu (14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1982 - 2004</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur (4)</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Penang (3)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Ipoh (3)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kota Bharu (2)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Johor Bharu (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents = 5 + 63 + 12 = 80

( ) = denote number of respondents

For the purpose for this study, respondents were placed into their respective generation age groups as shown in Table 2. For the sake of simplicity, when referring to the studied groups, these parameters were given simplified labels as presented below.

- **Group A** signifies respondents 53 years old or older (born in between 1943 to 1960) analogous to Baby Boomers in the US
- **Group B** signifies respondents who were in their 40s and mid 30s (born in 1961 to 1981) analogous to Gen X in the US
- **Group C** signifies young working respondents who were in their 20s and early 30s (born in 1982 onwards) analogous to Gen Y in the US

Many generational studies have been conducted in the US (or in other Western contexts); however, very limited studies have really focused on Asian societal contexts. Chan (2007) talks about the idea of generational gaps from a Singaporean prospective that for a manager who is from “Gen Y” might not be willing to communicate his or her different ideas to a Gen X employee for fear of being regarded as lacking respect that would mean not giving “face” to the other party, especially a worker who is much older. In the Asian context, especially in predominantly ethnic Chinese environments, such as in Taiwan, Singapore, and China, ‘face’ is defined as the concern for maintaining one’s dignity in an interpersonal setting.

Unfortunately, such studies have mostly borrowed the same western labelling (i.e. Gen X and Gen Y) without examining the relevance to the Asian experience during that time period. However, a study by Yi, Ribbens and Morgan (2010) on the generational differences in China re-defined the generational labelling based on the actual historical context in China to label generation cohorts, which included groups such as Cultural Revolution Generation for those born in 1960s, Social Reform Generation for those born in the 1970s. This latter group witnessed the drastic rate of modernization in China in their young adulthood. They labeled the Millennial Generation as those born during and after 1980s, who by far is the generation who have enjoyed the most freedom, career choices and who are the most affluent generation in China’s history. With this in mind, the following is the summarised data collected from 80 employed individuals in
the various age groups (A, B & C) across five cities in Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh, Kota Bharu and Johor Bharu) in de-defining generational gaps.

A. Attitudes towards work, life, career and worldview

Group A: Most of the respondents who are in this age group responded that education was not one of the main priorities when they were growing up and anyone who has a high school education level during this period is considered highly educated and respected for their struggle and hardship. One respondent noted that “education was expensive and only selected and [usually] the boys were given the opportunity to study; whereas the girls were expected to help to raise their siblings or do menial tasks.” Most of them commented that they had struggled and worked hard as youngsters in order to support their family and that they had been raised to appreciate those who gave them a job opportunity. Thus, they are very loyal to their job and to their employers. In particular one respondent noted “[back in the 70s] I have been work[ing] in the same company from day one until I just retired 4 months ago from the same company. I know it is hard to believe but I enjoyed my job very much and if I can I don’t want to retire yet”. This group of respondents see career growth as based on self-initiative such as studying on their own whilst working or having a willingness to learn new skills within their company. There is no such thing as an easy way around working hard for what you get for this group of respondents. All five of the respondents noted in their responses that they really have to work hard to prove themselves worthy at their job. Having to work hard, choosing the sorts of work or size of the salary was valued as being less important compared to simply having a job and a regular paycheck. Their expectations in work are very simple. One respondent wrote that

“...It was unheard of in those days [back in the 70s] about working benefits and often we do not mind working long hours as this as an opportunity to earn more money. Employers usually appreciate us as they are the one who has struggled together for the growth of the company.”

For this group of respondents, work and career are the priority for earnings-sake as their highest concern is to meet their day-to-day needs. In particular, one respondent recalled that she had to start working at the age of 15 as a teacher after completion of the O-level [equivalent in present time to PMR] order to support her youngest siblings as was the eldest child in the family. In a macroscopic view, most of them view their life as simple, and they do not see the reasons to have more money than what is necessary for necessities which means they only buy things that they need. The majority of these respondents have worked hard to have a stable income, and a few who are still working noted that they felt they were well off. For these respondents, it is likely that they have achieved a management position, or owned their company. Their life expectations tend to be cautious and they believe that working hard is the only solution to having a comfortable life. Many respondents [4 out of 5] noted that they came to believe that education is a crucial aspect in life and thus strove to instil this value in their children and the next generations. In terms of their perspective on worldview, this group of respondents said that they are not inclined toward social networking and the majority of them claimed not to be computer savvy like their children or their grandchildren. One respondent noted “nowadays we are surrounded by all these new high-tech gadgets and sometimes I feel I need to keep up with the pace”. They still prefer to send actual mail rather than emails or read physical books rather than electronic-books or articles. However, most claimed to have good knowledge of what is going on around them as they reported they read a lot of books, magazines and newspapers; and follow what is happening in the world as well as in locally. They were quite optimistic about the world overall.
Group B: This group of respondents are the offspring of the A Group generation (although some are younger siblings of the A Group). Currently, most B Group individuals are in their 40s or mid 30s and help comprise the majority of the active Malaysian workforce. They are the major wage earners of their families; supporting their retired parents as well as their offspring, who are mostly school age. This is the largest group of respondents in this study. This generation is said to have a broader outlook of the economic situation due to their exposure and education compared to the A Group. They have also witnessed their parents dedication and loyalty to work according to the literature (Codrington, 2011; Mitchell, McLean and Turner, 2005; Montana and Petit, 2008; Tsui, 2001). Because their parents stressed education as the key to success, most strived to excel in school and finish their high school. One respondent commented that:

"..I was born a Generation X and have been a self-starter and my highest education level was Form Six. The lack of education has not prevented me from a career progression and advancement. Despite the lack of a university paper qualification, it has not stopped me from willingness to work hard and learn new skills. I remember when I first started to work, computer was the latest technology. I do not even know how to use a computer during my first job shortly after leaving school but my willingness to learn has proved to be useful for my future employment. I was not trained professionally in any of choice of job but I worked hard and often overtimes and even during weekends to excel in my career.”

A majority of the respondents in this group claimed to be self-learners and independent employees; noting that independence was encouraged since their youth, when they had to fend for themselves at home whilst their parents worked. They aim to provide the best for their children in terms of lifestyle and education. In terms of education, most said they are doing quite well even though education considered necessary now is more than it was then. One respondent, who is in his late 40s, noted that “in those days, graduating with a SPM or STPM is considered sufficient and having a university degree is for the minority privilege. The only university education available is mostly the local university and there were scarce as only a few universities were available locally”. Comparing the late 90s to the present time, growth in local Malaysian higher education institutions (either public or private) has been exponential. However, as noted by one of the respondents: “Most of us were educated in the English medium or in missionary schools and thus our communication skills and comprehension of English language are considered high as compared to the Generation Y”. Compared to Group A, Group B seems to have a have a wider outlook on work and value having a career as a goal in itself. They are often workaholics and do not mind working long hours, as they want to advance in their careers. One respondent commented that

"..raising a family on own in my early twenties has help pushed me to a higher level of work commitment. At peak of my career, I was a work alcoholics and independent employees. At the same time, I know the need for a better education has study and work at the same time to obtain my diploma. However, it was insufficient as the job market was saturated with lots of university graduates; thus, I have enrolled for degree even though I am well into my middle age as I see myself with many more goods years to come.”

However, they are not “all work and no play”, as some of them have learnt to appreciate life is just not about working alone. They allocate time to work as well as time for relaxation. A few respondents noted that they are well aware of the changes around them, especially on the political and economical status of the nation especially the election campaigning by the political parties. Reading through scripts from this group of respondents, also provided the indication of political parties to be seem ambitious and hardworking but prefer to have work-life balance as they place value to leisure and their quality time spent with family. One
respondent (in his mid 30s) noted that “my motto of life is to work smart so that I can build up my financial stability”. From the career-wide perspective, this group willingly changes jobs if they feel there is no further advancement in the future. This generation has variety of skills and experiences as they prefer challenges and are “results orientated” compared to previous generation groups. They like to build a career that is universally transferable. About one-third of the respondents in this group mentioned their personal adventures career-hopping. In particular, one respondent noted: “Having the wide experience in IT project management and business management, I have been able to work in various jobs as consultants and project-based field-work in local gas and private MNC enterprise in the past 10 years”. As claimed in the literature (Mitchell, McLean and Turner, 2005; Reisenwitz and Iyer, 2009), this group is comfortable with computer usage and possesses better IT knowledge than the previous generation. Few respondents [especially for those in their 30s] mentioned that they are technologically adept and are very comfortable with the usage of the latest technology and gadgets. In terms of world view, this group claims to be well aware of what is happening around them. They are very fluent about current issues and conscious of the environment. The concept of travel abroad and experiencing different cultures are among key themes that emerged from this group of respondents. One respondent stated that “The world we know now is different from what my parents experienced, they don’t have the opportunity like I do I have the experience to study abroad during the 90s and gain international work experience in several MNC company that had sent me to various part of the world for work assignment. I think that when I think back the experience had taught me to be more to be more independent and view things from different perspectives”. Another respondent noted “I think we [Malaysian] know the world more than the American does...I once run into a American in airport who have no idea where on the world Malaysia is located and asked me is Malaysia part of China”. This generation group is able to adapt to the fast change of the world.

Group C: This group is the youngest group who have or are about to join the workforce. In general, this group does not have to work to help out their families, like group A did, because their parents have already provided for them comfortably. Most of this generation are the offspring of the Group A generation who have not witnessed hardships to the same degree as their parents. Most of the responses received from this group were quite brief and lacking in motivation and emotional expression for most of the questions asked. One participant wrote that “I have a good life so far, I just start working after my degree in August [last year] and nothing to comment on my work and career”. Several respondents noted that they much preferred to work for companies that would give them flexible hours over a fixed 8 to 5 schedule and would much prefer interesting work that would keep them challenged rather than a dull day-to-day routine. One young respondent commented that “I still looking for my ideal job” and further commented that “I am working as junior sale executive now for my present work just to have some income and to please my parent”. Most of them tend to job hop: it could be inferred that they get bored with monotonous work, and feel less loyalty to their employers. They have only short-term plans for their life and career, which can perhaps be because of their age. Due to the fact that their finances are often supported by their parents [or grandparents from the other successful generations], they may be more inclined, as a group to indulge in trendy and high tech gadgets more than Group B. This particular young respondent wrote that “I see life is significantly easy and as long as I have my phone [Iphone] with me I am good to go for anything”. This group seems to view the world with less expectation and recognise the unity of living in multi-ethnic country like in Malaysia. As one respondent put it: “Just do your part be a good citizen for the nation and I think we will be a safe if we all get along with each other no matter what your religion, ethnic groups and walk of life.”

Each generation has its own mind-set and level of thinking regarding every aspect of work, life, career and the world. In the brief analysis above, the three surveyed groups of Malaysians are quite different terms of their perspectives. Table 3 is a summary of the key differences that were noticeable from this study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Tend to be most loyal employee</td>
<td>Loyal employee up to certain level</td>
<td>Less loyal (usually with expectation of reward and benefits for loyalty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workaholics (passion towards works)</td>
<td>Workaholics yet balance between work-life balance</td>
<td>Demand work-life balance and job hoppings is a norm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Always seek for job security as it is difficult to get good work at their time</td>
<td>Pay attention to job security but always willing to adapt</td>
<td>Job security is not their main issue of concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td>Hard and tough life in their early life stage</td>
<td>Contended life</td>
<td>Comfortable life (under the parent protection and security)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfied with what they have (stable income and well off to do in their life for those who are still working)</td>
<td>Have a clear and long term vision towards life</td>
<td>Unclear vision towards life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They do not like to change unless it is necessary</td>
<td>life is considered balance with work as they place value to leisure and their quality time spent with family</td>
<td>Trendy (modernization and fashionable) and like social networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>They will change to adapt</td>
<td>Highly flexible to change and adaptation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Achievement-oriented, dedicated and career-focused</td>
<td>Independent, ambitious, resourceful and self-sufficient</td>
<td>Seek meaningful and challenging career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>Education is scarce (view education is the ways to get a better life)</td>
<td>First generation expose to technologies and obtain higher education degree</td>
<td>Choices of education are abundance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technologies and simple life (would prefer traditional-way of life, if given the option)</td>
<td>Value education</td>
<td>Generation adapt to technologies since young age (or since birth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good knowledge of what happening surrounding them</td>
<td>Globally and culturally- awareness (of what happening surrounding them)</td>
<td>Globally and culturally- awareness but not specifically concerned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown and discussed in an earlier section, the application of generational labels according to birth years was first popularised in the USA and was quickly picked up by the media in much of the Western world.
The labelling is now widely used across the globe, as well as in Malaysia. In order to evaluate the validity and appropriateness of applying the same labelling in the Malaysian context, Table 3 represents the results of the analysis from this study and make a comparison between both Western generational characteristics [as shown in Table 1] and Malaysian generational characteristics.

**TABLE 3: GENERATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS COMPARISON**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context of Comparison</th>
<th>Baby Boomers</th>
<th>Generation Group (Cohort)</th>
<th>Gen X</th>
<th>Group B</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
<th>Group C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economy</strong></td>
<td>Prosperity &amp; Booming</td>
<td>Struggle &amp; unstable</td>
<td>Downsizing &amp; Developing &amp; stable</td>
<td>Capitalism rules</td>
<td>Booming &amp; abundance opportunities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core Values</strong></td>
<td>Idealistic &amp; individuality</td>
<td>Hardworking &amp; realistic</td>
<td>Pessimistic &amp; diverse</td>
<td>Idealistic &amp; individuality</td>
<td>Positive &amp; globalised</td>
<td>Reliant &amp; globalised</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The comparison of generational characteristics of two specific contexts (economy and core values) between the Western countries (the USA in this particular case) and Malaysia show an entirely different picture of history. The economy state in the USA during the Baby Boomer period (1943 – 1960) was prosperous and ‘booming’ while in Malaysia [Group A] the scenario was the opposite: Malaysia was still struggling to achieve independence from European colonisation. The reason for prosperity boom in the USA’s economy resulted in a population ‘boom’ phenomenon. However, such population “boom” did not really take place in Malaysia in the same sense as it did in the USA (or other part of the western world, or even in Japan). On the other hand, Malaysia has experienced a continuous growth in population from the beginning of the 1960’s [after achievement of independence]. This growth produced a large young population [those now in the Group B generation] unlike the one presently being experienced in the western world. During the period of 1961 – 1981 [Gen X generation], many parts of the Western world (especially in the USA) are going through an economic contraction whereas Malaysia is on its way to be more economically stable after the declaration of independence. When examining the core value indicators relevant between the USA and Malaysia, it becomes evident that it is difficult to compare the realities of the generations in both countries. For the most part, there is an offset of at least one generation. This was particularly evident when examining the core values for the Baby Boomer generation in the USA is more similar to Group B in Malaysia. This lag between the USA and Malaysia is also reflected in the evolution in the job market and employment by economic sectors. The Western world is at odds, for the large part, with an aging population (Henken & Schippers, 2012; Kurjak, Ana Stavljenic, & Stanojevic, 2012). The problem arises from the need to replace the aging workforce. Contrarily, Malaysia has reached unprecedented economic growth and has a young population preparing to enter the workforce and into the market place. This young population will be more highly educated than the proceeding Malaysian generations (their grandparents or parents). They will be better “connected” to the world and will most likely be more aware of the competitiveness of a globalised word. For generational labelling to have contextual meaning, the comparison between Malaysian generations may be more relevant than the comparisons made between generations of the USA or other Western countries. The descriptors and terms used to define the Western generations are defined between generations not between countries. This type of comparison, between generations, is what gives the western labels their pertinence and meaning.
historically and socially. Hence, there is a need to re-define the generational labelling in Malaysia as the globally defined generational cohort [i.e Baby Boomer, Gen X and Gen Y] are unfit in the Malaysian context.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has provided a preliminary analysis of generational labelling in the Malaysian context, more specifically, re-defining the concepts of generational gaps from a Malaysian perspective. Though the labelling tags are used widely and adopted globally, as well as in the management practitioner literature, simply based on the generally accepted generational categories in the western world. This might not tell the complete picture for other parts of the world, especially in Malaysia. In order to understand the implications of the notion of “generations” it may be more logical to study generational cohorts in their proper and unique context, reflecting their own realities, rather than taking it directly from very different historical and socio-economic realities in the western world. In the present day, in most parts of the Western world, there is the question of an ever-increasing older population and lower birth rate. This is a global phenomenon; however, there are regional variances in demographic transitions that must be considered and generalised population theories may need to take account of this variety and the redefined generational gaps in this study have provided one approach to doing that.

Due to the changing nature of the demographic composition and the shortage of qualified applicants in the workforce, there has been increased interest of human resource specialists to target recruitment efforts towards specific subgroups of the population especially Group C generation employees. With the Group A generation starting into retirement age and the Group C generation entering the workforce, it is imperative that HR departments (or other stakeholders) should critically look at their recruitment practices. Should there be adjustments or adaptations be made by HR managers to enhance the effectiveness of their recruitment efforts? In terms of recruitment practice, there are a few adjustments or adaptations the HR managers should establish in order to enhance the effectiveness of their recruitment efforts. However, this is an important challenge in every business if we want to create a workplace where Group C generation employees can work productively alongside others already in the workforce. Research suggests that employers must pay attention to the fit between the fresh graduates’ expectations (in this case is the Group C generation) and what they will actually experience in order to ensure they remain satisfied; as the goal of effective recruitment practices is employees who both benefit the company and take opportunities to advance to their abilities (Westerman and Yammamura, 2007). As shown in this study, Group C generation have grown up with parents attempting to shield them from threats and as well as taking a much more prosperous society for granted compared to previous group generations. Most of the Group C generation have somewhat unrealistic expectations, they expect more from the companies in terms of salary, rewards and work-life balance. It is logical to conclude that giving Group C workplace flexibility is no longer a “perk” as it may have been seen by earlier generations, for Group C it is a fundamental right. Group C tends to change jobs frequently; thus it is important to let Generation C to have a sense of belonging that cultivates the commitment and loyalty towards the organisation. An example of how this could be accomplished might be would be encouraging trust by listening to their views. Take an example: in a staff meeting, the supervisor/HR manager can listen and encourage the Group C employees have a chance to share their ideas and comment as it can help to motivate and empower them to build a sense of belong for their workplace. Managers need to recognise that frequent shift of job can actually reduce their chances of moving up the management chain. HR departments (or supervisor) should help managers and employees to realise that a robust record of commitment and delivery is a passport to career advancement. Face time – or “time on the clock” can serve as a proxy for commitment and ambition. However that comes as a bit of a surprise to many of today’s newest employees. Group C clearly prefers jobs defined by task, not merely “time on the
clock”. That’s not a new concept. Many younger employees find they can complete tasks faster than older workers can; perhaps partly because of technological proficiency but it may be because they work differently. They spend less time scheduling and are comfortable coordinating electronically. They resent being asked to log hours and stay in the office after their tasks are done, and the idea of face time really annoys them. Group C loves to work asynchronously – anytime and anywhere. Practical realities are also moving us toward a task-based definition of jobs. Who can say how long it takes to write a piece of software?? Moreover, with the early assignment of mentoring or coaching support for fresh Group C employees will be particularly helpful as they look for candid perspectives and genuine support. In fact, there are studies and evidence that the assignment of internal Group A (or Group B) generation’ workers as a coach or mentor has been seen as important a means of securing knowledge transfer within an organisation (Sayers, 2007; Shaw and Fairhurst, 2008). Similar approaches in handling mentoring relationships might be gained through the development of circle of support (networks) system that groups of Group C generations employees from across the organisation’s meeting to share information and with colleagues who have similar issues and challenges. Such an approach would certainly fit well with Group C generation’s desire for social and interactive learning. Group C no longer defines a good job solely in terms of monetary gain. They take a job because they want to work there, not because they have to. They look for an organisation where they can create good relationships with their employers and colleagues. To be successful in their recruitment, organisations must have social flair such as internal events and team building activities to appeal to this audience. Besides, this group is less likely to respond to the traditional type of command and control style, in fact, they are more receptive to open communication in the workplace. Finally, to retain Group C generation’ employees, it is important to show appreciation for their individuality and allow them to have input into the decision-making process. It is important not to just give orders, but to provide the reasoning behind them, and explain how important they, as individuals, are to the success of the organisation.

The present study is not without limitations. Several limitations were apparent and must be considered. The sample size was restricted to populations in five major cities due to the inability of reaching out to other parts of the country to solicit more respondents to participate in this study. Thus conclusions can only be pointed to with uncertainty. Secondly, this study was performed in a cross sectional study with limited period and focuses on one point in time. The results might vary if the study was based on a longitudinal design as attitudes and values towards life, work, career and worldview change over time thus a longitudinal study would be more suitable to grasp such detail. Nevertheless, this study have raised the possibilities for future studies that acquired much larger sample size so that it can capture the higher generalisation impacts and perhaps a longitudinal study should be carried out. In summary, though this study cannot be generalise nor can the results fully representing the all generations of Malaysians on such a topic, yet this study has attempted to redefine the concepts of generational gaps from a Malaysian perspective, and to point to the weakness in adopting generational labels from other societies with different historical experiences.

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