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INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT: GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN WORKPLACE MOTIVATION

Introduction

In the course of its history the United States intelligence community (IC) has undergone many reforms. Contemporary reforms have emphasized both organizational and workforce initiatives. Yet, there is increasing concern that transformational initiatives must be considered in the context of changing workforce demographics (Office of the Director of National Intelligence [ODNI], 2006). Changing workforce characteristics may impact the effectiveness of pay, reward, and recognition systems if demographic based generational differences in the workforce translate into new norms of expectation and motivation. Research indicates that generational differences may impact workplace motivation (Bolton, 2010) but its impact in the IC workforce remains to be fully assessed. This study addressed the research need to conduct an IC workforce assessment that can empirically categorize generational differences in workplace motivation.

Reform initiatives within the IC and emergent demographic shifts have created a need to re-examine the foundations, and potential differences, of workplace motivation. For example, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's (ODNI) Analytic Transformation initiative seeks to shift longstanding intelligence operations in the direction of greater collaboration (ODNI, 2008). Such an emphasis on workplace production and interpersonal environments may benefit from a greater understanding of the motivational needs of employees. In addition, the Defense Civilian Intelligence Personnel System (DCIPS) initiative to move the intelligence community workforce to a pay for performance system could be jeopardized by poor employee confidence (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2009). The decision to refocus the DCIPS program is likely to bring new attention to the

relationship between performance incentives and employee motivational needs. Concurrent with these initiatives is the awareness that workforce demographics are changing as the current generation of leaders and analysts are replaced by the next workforce cohort (ODNI, 2008). The goal of this pilot study was to attempt to make a practical contribution to the ongoing dialogue by considering a comparative, empirically based approach to understanding workplace motivation within the intelligence community.

Background

The events of September 11, 2001 provided a new sense of urgency to longstanding concerns over the need to make improvements within the U.S. intelligence community. The current research examined convergent trends in reform initiatives and workplace demographics through the theoretical lens of employee motivational needs.

Reform and strategic alignment

The 9/11 attacks resulted in the development of a broad governmental reform agenda. These reforms consisted of both organizational and workforce initiatives. For example, the 9/11 Commission recommended several transformational organizational changes for intelligence such as the establishment of a National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) and the unification of the intelligence community under a new National Intelligence Director (9/11 Commission, n. d.). Subsequently, the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-458) established both the NCTC and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (Best, 2010). In the spirit of reform the ODNI began the development of a series of analytic transformation initiatives designed to increase information sharing and integration such as the establishment of an IC badge interoperability program, a joint duty program, and the introduction of collaborative efforts such as Intellipedia, A-Space, the Summer Hard Problem Program, and the Library of National Intelligence (Best, 2010; ODNI, 2008). Concurrent with functionally focused initiatives such as these is a concern that there is also a need to strategically align workforce initiatives, including measures to address the impact of changing workforce demographics, within an integrated approach (ODNI, 2006).

Shifting workforce demographics

Changing workforce demographics have become of increasing concern within the intelligence community. Of particular concern is an imbalance within the IC workforce in which there exists a disproportionate concentration of post-9/11 employees on one hand and a large pool of retirement eligible employees on the other hand (ODNI, 2006). This imbalance is the result of tight budgets and constrained hiring during the 1990's, which created a gap in workforce accession, and a resurgent wave of post-9/11 new hires (ODNI, 2006). The Office of the Director of National Intelligence has specifically expressed concern over the 'greening' of the workforce and need to maintain a sense of urgency in transformational initiatives (ODNI, 2008).

However, while concerns have been focused on the youngest portion of the U.S. workforce, the global recession has also had an unexpected impact on the 'grayer' end of the total U.S. workforce. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), those aged 55 and older made up 18.7 percent of the workforce and that percentage is expected to grow to 22.7 percent by 2016. Overall, it is projected that the U.S. workforce will increase by 12.8 million workers from 2006 to 2016. The number of workers ages 16 to 24 will decrease by 1.5 million, the number ages 25 to 54 will increase by 2.5 million, and the number ages 55 and older will increase by 11.9 million (See Pew Research Center, 2009). However, a dramatic generational transition is anticipated as the oldest workforce cohort retires (Gilburg, 2007).

It is not a surprise that the ODNI has identified shifting workplace demographics as a key external condition that can shape IC transformation (ODNI, 2008). The ODNI has specifically expressed a need to win the war for talent in the competitive labor market by both recruiting and retaining the best and brightest candidates (ODNI, 2006). This recruiting challenge may also be shaped by perceptions that new workforce cohorts possess generational differences. There is a perceived need within the intelligence community to recalibrate its human capital system to accommodate the needs of a new workforce generation that may possess different norms of work and interaction than the previous generation (ODNI, 2006). The present comparative study specifically examined that concern by conducting an empirical assessment of motivational needs.

Generational cohorts

The U.S. workforce consists of at least four generations coexisting within the workplace. These generations are categorized by year of birth cohorts. From most aged to youngest, they may be labeled as Seniors (1900 – 1945), Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964), Generation X (1965 – 1980), and Generation Y (1981 – 2000) (Bolton, 2010). However, these titles and age ranges are not definitive. For example, the Seniors cohort may be also referred to as Traditionalists or Veterans, Generation X as Xers, and Generation Y as Millennials or Nexters (Bolton, 2010; Legault, 2002). In addition, the age ranges may vary slightly with the Baby Boomer cohort alternatively described as 1944 – 1960 and Generation X as 1961 – 1980 (Legault, 2002). Because one purpose of this study is to inform transformational discussions, it selected to focus on Generation X (defined as 1960 - 1979) and Generation Y (defined as 1980 - 2000) since these cohorts will begin career transitions into mid- and senior-level management positions. Therefore, it would be reasonable for policies being developed now to consider their impending rise in the workforce.

Age-based workforce cohorts are of importance because they may potentially embody different value systems and attributes. Before a full understanding of the IC workforce can be attained, it is helpful to first understand the attributes of the general workforce from which it is drawn. Although research continues to explore their differences, Figure 1 provides a broad conceptualization of attribute differences between the Generation X and Generation Y cohorts (see Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007).

Figure 1. Comparative attributes of Generation X and Generation Y

	Generation X	Generation Y
Work ethic	Task-oriented	Multi-tasking
	Self-reliant	Group-oriented
	Independent	Explain why
Communication	Direct	Email/voice mail
	As needed	Instant messaging
Feedback	Direct - "Tell me how I am doing."	Instantaneous
		Seek approval/praise
Stereotype	Cynical	Spoiled
	Less open to change	Open to change

Generation X is described as being a technologically savvy generation, pragmatic and competent; they are efficient at managing themselves to get the job done. They tend to be free agents, frequently distrusting corporate motives, and most have received very little training, development or mentoring in the workplace, and hence are adept at learning on the fly (Gilburg, 2007). Family is a priority to Generation X. They put family first over their careers and often come in and out of the workforce to meet family needs (Williams, 2009). Other common descriptors of this generation are cynical, distrust of authority, self-sufficient, casual and value quality of life. Key influences on this generation have been corporate downsizing, Nixon resignation and pardon, latchkey kids, legacy of Vietnam pull out and the rapid growth of technology (Licata, 2010). Motivators of Generation X are freedom to do things their way or independence. Irritators can be described as clichés, authority figures, and formalities (Licata, 2010).

Generation Y is described as self sufficient, hard working, hopeful, relaxed gender roles, comfortable with diversity, value networks and groups, highly knowledgeable and comfortable with technology. Key Influences for this generation have been school shootings/violence, the Challenger disaster, Gulf War, Dessert Storm, War of Terror, soccer moms/helicopter parents, and highly scheduled childhoods (Licata, 2010). Generation X motivators seem to be work-home balance, working in teams, structure and supervision, feedback, understanding the details of why and how things are to be done, make a difference, and friendship in the workplace. Irritators for this cohort can be described as long/rigid working hours, in flexibility, strictly independent/isolated work. They are fundamentally conservative in their lifestyle, with a dislike of ambiguity and risk (Williams, 2009).

Theoretical foundations

The motivational theories of Maslow, Alderfer, and Herzberg include needs based dimensions (Agarwal, 2010). Their theories include both extrinsic (external) and intrinsic (internal) sources of needs satisfaction. Maslow described a five-tiered hierarchy of needs which were ordered in precedence from physiological needs to self-actualization (Myers, 1995). Alderfer reduced Maslow's hierarchy from five to three factors, re-conceptualizing needs as

related to existence, relatedness, and growth (Agarwal, 2010). Herzberg's two-factor approach characterized needs satisfaction as either motivation (intrinsic) or maintenance (extrinsic) factors (Baldonado & Spangenburg, 2009). The current study continues the exploration of internal and external dimensions by categorizing extrinsic and intrinsic motivational drivers within the IC workforce.

Intrinsic motivation is achieved when the activity itself provides pleasure and satisfaction (Vallerand et al., 1992). Intrinsic motivation can be expressed in several forms. One is the activity itself (e.g., attending a lecture about a subject one is interested in), meeting standards for their own sake (e.g., ethical standards or production standards), or accomplishing a personal or professional goal (Frey & Osterloh, 2002). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation refers to a wide range of activities that are engaged in not for their own sake but for the potential end state (Vallerand et al., 1992). Extrinsic rewards often take the form of tangible financial rewards (Thomas, 2009). In the context of workplace motivation, extrinsic rewards often relate to a need to satisfy non-work related needs and work serves as a tool to satisfy those needs by the salary or tangible rewards it provides (Frey & Osterloh, 2002).

Method

In this exploratory qualitative study, the researchers sought consensus among employees working in a U.S. Department of Defense intelligence activity regarding workplace motivations. A modified Delphi method with two rounds of questionnaires was used followed by a survey on preferences for current workplace reward and recognition options. The Delphi method is useful in conditions where consensus is sought and where the research goal is to distinguish and clarify perceived human motivations (Linstone & Turoff, 2002).

The goal of the present research was to establish employee preferences in two areas: workplace motivational needs and reward and recognition preferences. It was conducted in two rounds as a short survey questionnaire. In Round 1 participants ranked the top 5 preferred (1-5, most preferred to less preferred) workplace motivators based on the Workplace Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale (WEIMS) (Tremblay, Blanchard, Villeneuve, Taylor, & Pelletier, 2009). Participants were also provided with the opportunity to add additional motivators to the

list and to provide comments. The WEIMS provides a list of 18 extrinsic and intrinsic workplace motivations (i.e., “Because it allows me to earn money” and “Because it has become a fundamental part of who I am”) and has been found statistically sound for research use (Tremblay et al., 2009).

After consolidation of Round 1 results and comments, a Round 2 survey was conducted in which participants re-ranked their preferences for workplace motivators from the new consensus-based list. The Round 2 list included the original WEIMS components plus any new motivational preferences stated by participants during Round 1. Additionally, in order to provide an assessment of current workplace reward and recognition options, employees also concurrently completed a survey in each round in which they sorted available reward and recognition options (i.e., bonuses, time off awards, verbal praise, etc.) in preference order from 1 – 5 (most preferred to less preferred).

Results

This exploratory study conducted a comparative assessment of civilian employees ($n = 19$) currently working in a U.S. Department of Defense intelligence activity. This sample size represented 16.4 percent of the total civilian participants available across all age cohorts. Participants included a non-probabilistic sample of individuals born between 1960-1980, referred to as Generation X ($n = 10$), and individuals born between 1980-2000, referred to as Generation Y ($n = 9$).

Figure 2. Descriptive statistics for Generation X and Generation Y employees

		Generation X	Generation Y
Employment status	Supervisory	4	2
	Non-supervisory	6	7
IC experience (years)	Mean	14.8	4.3
Gender	Male	8	6
	Female	2	3
Age (years)	Mean	42.3	27.2

Employment status included supervisory (Generation X, $n = 4$; Generation Y, $n = 2$) and non-supervisory (Generation X, $n = 6$; Generation Y, $n = 7$) personnel. Total work experience within the IC for Generation X was Mean = 14.8, and for Generation Y was Mean = 4.3. The sample included both male (Generation X, $n = 8$; Generation Y, $n = 6$) and female (Generation X, $n = 2$; Generation Y, $n = 3$) participants. Ages for Generation X was Mean = 42.3, and for Generation Y was Mean = 27.2. See Figure 2 for a summary of Generation X and Generation Y descriptive statistics.

Workplace motivations

In Round 1 of this study participants ranked 18 workplace motivators from the Workplace Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale in order of preference. This scale asks respondents to assess the reasons why they are involved in their current work. In addition, they were provided the opportunity to list any additional workplace motivator that they considered important. For Generation X, respondents provided two additional workplace motivators (Because I want to make a difference; Because it allows me to spend more time with my family). For Generation Y, respondents provided 8 additional workplace motivators (e.g., Because my work contributes to something greater; Because I am connected to my work environment and enjoy being at work).

In Round 2 participants were provided the newly expanded list and were asked to re-rank all the items. The result was a preference list of the top 5 workplace motivators for each workforce generation (see Figure 3). This iterative, consensus process resulted in one new item not listed on the WEIMS list (Because I want to make a difference) to enter into consideration by Generation X and be ranked as a preference. It also resulted in one new item not listed on the WEIMS list [For unique experiences (e.g., travel, work with other nations, etc.)] to enter into consideration by Generation Y and be ranked as a preference. It is interesting to note that the top 2 motivational preferences are both intrinsic and are shared by both workforce generations.

Figure 3. Generational workplace motivation preferences

Rank	Generation X		Generation Y	
	Item	Type	Item	Type
1	For the satisfaction I experience from taking on interesting challenges.	Intrinsic	Because I derive much pleasure from learning new things.	Intrinsic
	Because I derive much pleasure from learning new things.	Intrinsic	For the satisfaction I experience from taking on interesting challenges.	Intrinsic
3	Because I want to make a difference.	Intrinsic	For the income it provides me.	Extrinsic
4	For the satisfaction I experience when I am successful at doing difficult tasks.	Intrinsic	Because this type of work provides me with security.	Extrinsic
5	Because it has become a fundamental part of who I am.	Intrinsic	For unique experiences (e.g., travel, work with other nations, etc.).	Intrinsic

Reward and recognition preferences

In Round 1 of this study participants also ranked 18 workplace reward and recognition options derived from current organizational policies in order of preference. In addition, they were provided the opportunity to list any other additional workplace reward and recognition preference that they considered important. For Generation X, respondents provided 2 additional reward and recognition options (Recognition from peers/co-workers; Verbal recognition from Headquarters). For Generation Y, respondents provided 4 additional reward and recognition options (e.g., Opportunity to do something I wouldn't be able to as a civilian; Enhanced reputation among colleagues).

In Round 2 participants were provided the newly expanded list and were asked to re-rank all the items. The result was a preference list of the top 5 workplace reward and recognition preferences for each workforce generation (see Figure 4). The iterative, consensus process used in the present study resulted in no new item not already listed on Round 1 survey to be ranked as a preference.

Regarding Generation Y reward and recognition preferences, it is important to note that although the preference for an end of year performance bonus ranked first in terms of the frequency in which it was included in the top 5 preferences, in no case was it ranked higher than 4 on a scale of 1 – 5. Yet, although the preference for verbal recognition from supervisor was ranked just lower based on frequency count, in no case did it receive a mark of lower than a 1

on a scale of 1 – 5. These results may indicate that, although extrinsic rewards are considered broadly important, there is a dominant preferential bias toward intrinsic rewards and recognition.

Figure 4. Generational reward and recognition preferences

Rank	Generation X		Generation Y	
	Item	Type	Item	Type
1	Verbal recognition from your supervisor.	Intrinsic	Verbal recognition from your supervisor.	Intrinsic
2	Recognition from peers or co-workers.	Intrinsic	End of year performance bonus.	Extrinsic
3	Verbal recognition from the unit Commander.	Intrinsic	Verbal recognition from your Division Head.	Intrinsic
4	End of year performance bonus.	Extrinsic	Verbal recognition from the unit Commander.	Intrinsic
5	Verbal recognition from your Division Head.	Intrinsic	Spot Award - Monetary bonus.	Extrinsic

Discussion

The IC maintains a concern over the impending generational shift in its workforce and the potential for a clash of workforce cultures to occur (ODNI, 2006). However, the results of this modest study indicate that it is likely that Generation X and Y workforce cohorts may, in fact, share several motivational preferences. For example, it is interesting to note that the top 2 motivational preferences (For the satisfaction I experience from taking on interesting challenges; Because I derive much pleasure from learning new things) are both intrinsic and are both shared by Generation X and Y workforce cohorts (see Figure 3). Research has indicated there may be other shared motivational dimensions across workforce generations, including a desire for respect, flexibility, fairness, and the opportunity to do interesting and rewarding work (Watt, 2010). These findings and the present study’s results may challenge decision and policy makers within the IC to re-think perceptions of differences within the workforce and consider how to best take advantage of its shared motivational components.

The present study found that Generation X and Y reported a mixed preference for both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and recognitions (see Figure 4). However, the present study did find a dominant, but not exclusive, preference for intrinsic motivation. These findings are

generally supported by Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation which requires that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors to be present at minimum levels. In this sense, the factors can be seen as parallels, not opposites (Bolton, 2010). Extrinsic rewards can be characterized as necessary but not sufficient. That is, the presence of extrinsic rewards is necessary to avoid worker dissatisfaction, but without being complemented by intrinsic rewards they are insufficient to achieve full worker satisfaction. So, there may be a need for reward systems to achieve a pragmatic and motivational balance.

In addition, a surprise finding of this study was the elevation of each of 3 verbal praises into the top 5 list of preferred forms of rewards and recognitions (see Figure 4). Although the specific rankings differed slightly, each generation categorized verbal recognition from supervisor, Division Head, and unit Commander as important. It is revealing that Generation X and Y both reported that verbal praise from their immediate supervisor was the most preferred source of reward or recognition. This emphasis on the immediate organizational chain of command and personal leadership is striking. Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory describes role processes between leaders and subordinates. Research has established that verbal praise produces an increase in intrinsic motivation (Cameron & Pierce, 1994) and that favorable downward exchange relationships (i.e., leader to subordinate) are usually associated with higher satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, and better subordinate performance (Yukl, 2002). The results of the present study may prompt a re-thinking of the role that leadership serves and its reconsideration as a source of motivational reward for the workforce.

The results of the present study may also encourage a re-conceptualization of differences in workforce generational cohorts. The current trend may be to see workforce cohorts as distinct and static, that is, they are likely to continue their current traits into the future. However, that may not be fully true. Over their lifespan people face different normative challenges at various age levels in their lives (Erikson, 1959/1980). The present study's finding of a preference in Generation X for intrinsic motivation and a mixed preference in Generation Y for both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations may reflect the lifecycle challenges of their current chronological ages. For example, Generation Y's mixed motives may reflect their need to achieve both social and career goals common at all persons at their age. It may be possible that

Generation Y will move toward the motivational pattern of Generation X as it matures in its life cycle (Jorgensen, 2003). That is, the Generation Y of today may become the Generation X of the future. This observation may indicate that transformational initiatives must be prepared to address a variety of age differences simultaneously since differences may be tied to individual life cycle stage instead of generational cohort status.

Limitations and future research

A research objective of the present study was to validate the Delphi method as suitable for assessment of workplace motivational needs. Despite limitations of sample size in the present study, the Delphi method was able to define clear distinctions in motivational preferences. While the open comment component of the Delphi method was able to bring new preferences to light, this component of the study may be considered for expansion in a future study. That is, a future study may consider a combined approach, one that utilizes the Delphi method to achieve consensus and define preferences as well as a content analytic approach to more rigorously examine the thematic content of survey comments. It may be possible that nuanced observations on generational preferences may be discovered in participant commentary.

Of particular interest to future researchers may be the potential for additional similarities or differences to exist in preferred communication styles between workforce generations. A surprise finding of the present study was that verbal praise was highly preferred by both Generation X and Generation Y cohorts. Since this finding appears to contradict previous research that supports generational differences in communication preferences (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Hammill, 2005), this topic may be of further research interest.

Conclusion

The research goal of this exploratory study was to examine convergent trends in IC reform and workplace demographics through the theoretical lens of employee motivational needs. Its findings that some common motivational needs are shared across workforce cohorts

may challenge a rethinking of the perception that divisive generational differences may exist within the workforce. Further, despite recent emphasis on pay for performance as a workforce management tool, it was found that intrinsic motivational needs and rewards are the dominant employee preferences. Since research results indicate that these are strongly based on direct employee and management communication, there may be a need for transformational initiatives to expand their focus from policy to include issues of workplace leadership.

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