

# Do different generations look differently at high performance organizations?

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Many researchers argue that the shared values of a generation affect people's attitude, commitment, and ethics toward work. It is also argued that generational differences may cause tension between employees and with that prevent projects – such as a transition to a high performance organization (HPO) – from being completed successfully. The purpose of this paper is to examine whether generational differences in work values influence people's perceptions of HPO, and if so, in what ways and how management could deal with it. The HPO Framework developed by de Waal (2012b) was used as a starting point for the study.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study was performed at a Dutch multinational with a management trainee program. In this program, young talents, all belonging to Generation Y, followed a series of internships in various business units. A questionnaire on HPO was distributed among the trainees and their direct managers (all Generation Xers). The average scores for the five factors described in the HPO Framework were calculated for both groups. In addition, attention points were identified for the multinational, i.e. issues that needed to be addressed by the organization in order for it to become an HPO. The scores and the attention points were discussed in a workshop with both trainees and managers. Finally, the results of the workshop were analyzed and several weeks later presented by the authors to a larger audience, to validate the research findings.

**Findings** – The research results showed that there was a close match between the opinions of trainees (Generation Yers) and of managers (Generation Xers) concerning the general importance of the HPO factors, the organization's performance on these factors, and the actions needed to improve on them. There were several explanations for the fact that generational differences did not influence the opinions of both generations on HPO. For example, the corporate culture in a multinational may be predominant over national culture, creating uniform thinking; or new employees adapt quickly to the organization and behave according to established patterns and thereby comply to the accepted way of thinking in the company.

**Research limitations/implications** – The practical implication of this study is that an organization does not have to target specific groups to convince people of the importance of HPO. It should be sufficient to hold an informative session for all staff on HPO before starting the joint HPO transition process.

**Originality/value** – This is the first study into how generational differences in work values could influence the opinions of various generations on HPO.

**Keywords** High performance organizations, Work values, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, Generation Yers  
**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

In today's workplace one can distinguish three generations of employees: Baby Boomers or Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964); Generation Xers (1965-1981); and Millennials or Generation Yers (1982-1999) (DelCampo *et al.*, 2011; Lyons and Kuron, 2014; Quinn, 2010). A generation is defined as a group of people born within a specified birth year range who grew up in the same historical and socio-cultural context, and shared formative life experiences, such as pop culture, economic conditions, world events, natural disasters, technology, and as a result developed core values that are different from those of other generations (Mannheim, 1952; Pilcher, 1994; Schullery, 2013; Underwood, 2007). Many authors argue that these values affect people's attitude, commitment, ways of working, and work values in the workplace; and also that differences in values may create tensions between different generations (Dittman, 2005; Gordon and Steele, 2005; Zemke *et al.*, 1999). Such tensions may hamper the successful implementations of projects and lead to increase in employee turnover, difficult communications and poor morale (Dittman, 2005;



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Lancaster and Stillman, 2002; Bontekoning, 2007). Managers of organizations are generally advised to take generational differences into account when managing multiple generations simultaneously in the workplace, and to approach generations differently (Steele and Gordon, 2012).

The transformation to a high performance organization (HPO) is a significant change for an organization (Collins, 2001). An HPO is defined as an organization that achieves financial and non-financial results that are increasingly better than those of its peer group over a period of five years or more (de Waal, 2012a). To become and stay an HPO it is essential that every employee works toward improving the organization. However, as the CEO of a Dutch multinational (Boomer generation) commented in an interview with the authors: "I'm not sure Generation Y is willing to put in the effort to transform our company into an HPO." This remark may not be far off the mark, given the fact that different generations have different work values. However, this does not necessarily mean that different generations think differently about HPO. This study aims to shed some light on the issue by answering the following research question:

*RQ1.* Do different generations look differently at HPO, and if so, in what ways?

The theoretical contribution of this study is that it is the first to connect generational research to HPO research, by examining how generations perceive HPO. This will stimulate the debate on generational differences in the workplace, and on how to deal with these. In addition, this study advances the debate between proponents and opponents of the existence of generational differences in the workplace. The practical contribution of the study is that it enables managers to consider the various viewpoints of the different generations and increase mutual understanding and better cooperation in transforming an organization into an HPO. The study results also make it possible for managers to make an informed choice between moving the organization forward to HPO (when generations are on the same page regarding HPO), and not even attempting to start an HPO transition (because there is too much difference of opinion in the organization on HPO).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The following two sections provide a summary of the literature on generations in the workplace and literature on the HPO Framework (de Waal, 2012b), which was used in this study. Subsequently, a description is given of the research approach, followed by a discussion of the research findings. The paper ends with a conclusion, the research limitations, and recommendations for further research.

### **Generations in the workplace**

Until now, research on generational differences in the workplace has identified differences in factors such as personality, work values, attitudes, career expectations and experiences, teamwork, and leadership (Lyons and Kuron, 2014). Glass (2007) argues that the three generations which currently exist in the business world each possess unique characteristics that affect their work ethic and relationships, their perception of organizational hierarchy, and how they manage change. In addition, Glass remarks that these differences between generations impact two areas of human resources policy and employee development efforts – retention and motivation – which have to be tailored to each generation. As a logical follow-on to Glass' research, Kapoor and Solomon (2011) state that employers must identify the separate characteristics of each generation present in their workplace, and that they should foster a work environment that aids productivity for every generation. In their study on generational differences in psychological traits and their impact on the workplace, Twenge and Campbell (2008) note that generational differences are psychological as well as technological (e.g. the use of social media). They add that organizations must be ready to cope with, in particular, the psychological differences, as these may cause (younger) employees to have unrealistically high expectations, a high need for praise, and difficulties

with criticism, thus creating an increase in creativity demands, job-hopping, and casual dressing in the workplace. Organizations need to consider how to respond to the different generations in their workforce. Joshi *et al.* (2010) state that the generations in today's organizations differ in aspects of personalities, work values and attitudes, leadership and teamwork preferences, leader behaviors, and career experiences. The cause for these differences could be, as Joshi *et al.* (2010, p. 393) propose, that employees have a generational identity, which is defined as "an individual's knowledge that he or she belongs to a generational group/role, together with some emotional and value significance to him or her of this group/role membership." As such, individuals that share a generational identity will have common work-related expectations and values (Dencker *et al.*, 2008). Bennett *et al.* (2012) examined how the current generations work together in different ways and explore organizational strategies for managing the transition of knowledge. They found that changing patterns of work actually force organizations to adapt their culture to meet the demands and expectations of new generations of workers regarding the sharing and use of knowledge. Hernaus and Pološki Vokic (2014) specifically looked at whether job characteristics differed per generation. They found that, while the nature of job characteristics was mostly unrelated to generations, social job characteristics (such as work autonomy, interaction with others, interdependence, teamwork) to some extent did differ among generational cohorts. Finally, Becton *et al.* (2014) found that Baby Boomers exhibited fewer job mobility behaviors and more instances of compliance-related behaviors in comparison with both Generation Xers and Millennials, while Generation Xers were less likely to work overtime in comparison with Baby Boomers and Millennials (although these differences were not overly strong).

Table I provides an overview of the differences in work-related values per generation as derived from the literature. It includes only studies that examined differences between at least two generations. As not all the studies compared the three generations present in the workplace, a "line to line comparison" in Table I is not possible. Therefore Table I is rather an overview than a true comparison between the Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Generation Yers.

This overview does not imply that, in the academic field, generational differences are universally acknowledged as existing in the workplace (Schullery, 2013). In fact, there are quite a few authors who state that the generational differences described in previous studies may result from: methodological problems and limitations of those studies; it concerns age differences rather than generational differences; or similarities between generations rather than differences (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2005; Costanza and Finkelstein, 2015; Jorgenson, 2003; Jurkiewicz, 2000; Jurkiewicz and Brown, 1998; Parry and Urwin, 2011; Yang and Guy, 2006). Even when generational differences in work values were found, there was no consensus in the literature on the actual effect of these differences on performance in the workplace. Twenge *et al.* (2010) found small to moderate effects, while Armour (2005) reported that over 60 percent of employers see generational differences as a main cause of tension between employees, causing decreased performance.

Research on generations is based on two distinct perspectives: first, the social forces perspective, which views generations as interrelated and multidimensional social groups that take shape within the flow of history; second, the cohort perspective, which views generations as collections of people born in a given time period (Gilleard, 2004; Laufer and Bengtson, 1974; Lyons and Kuron, 2014). This study takes the cohort perspective, as most researchers focus on mean differences among birth cohorts (Foster, 2013; Lyons and Kuron, 2014).

### **Description of the HPO Framework**

This study examines whether generational differences in work values influence people's perceptions of HPO, and if so, in what ways and how management could deal with it. The HPO Framework developed by de Waal (2012b) was used as a starting point for the study.

Work-related values	Baby Boomer	Generation Xer	Generation Yer
Attitude toward work	Lives to work Has a high job satisfaction Looks for job security Wants to feel that the job is important	Works to live Wants a life outside work Is mobile Rates security but at the same time values independence highly Wants to feel that the job is important	Finds leisure very important Values freedom Wants a job that is interesting
Authority and hierarchy	Shows respect to authority and the hierarchy Finds adequate and clear roles important Wants to be respected as a person	Is not intimidated by authority Expects to be asked for input Wants to be respected as a person	Prefers a clear structure Respects position Is less motivated by power Wants to be respected as a person
Change readiness	Accepts but does not embrace change Puts emphasis on (re)structuring	Is more open to change Puts emphasis on improving quality and professionalism	Puts emphasis on continuous change which gives (personal) satisfaction
Communication	Likes to discuss and argue	Likes to share	Likes to be fast and targeted
Conflict handling	Avoids conflicts Looks for a guilty party	Looks at the issue from all sides Stays well-balanced and level-headed	Has the motto "live and let live" Can live with the situation when there is no solution for the conflict
Decision making	Looks for consensus and a majority decision	Is pragmatic and looks for "what just works"	Takes fast decisions based on having a "good feeling"
Development	Looks for self-development Looks for intellectual stimulation Regards personal growth highly	Looks for self-development Wants to learn continuously in the workplace	Wants to learn continuously and interactively in the workplace Wants to learn from everybody Likes to be multitaskers
Feedback	May be insulted by continuous feedback	Welcomes immediate and continuous feedback	Welcomes immediate and continuous feedback
Loyalty	Is loyal to the organization Has a low willingness to quit the organization	Has a medium commitment to the organization Values relations with co-workers above that with the organization	Feels more loyalty to an idea, cause or product than to the organization
Relations	Strives for consensus Strives to create a good working atmosphere	Looks to bundle useful expertise of people Looks to book results Rates co-worker support highly	Looks to establish meaningful contacts Doesn't keep to the "old" borders Believes in collective action Likes teamwork
Rewards	Looks for extrinsic rewards Has willingness to wait turn for promotion	Looks for both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards Seeks promotion based on ability Expects immediate recognition and quick promotion	Looks for intrinsic rewards but ranks economic returns also highly Is motivated by an affiliative workplace

**Sources:** Summarized from: Benson and Brown (2011), Cennamo and Gardner (2008), Chen and Choi (2008), Deal (2007), Gursoya *et al.* (2008), Karp *et al.* (2002), Kunreuther (2003), Lyons *et al.* (2007, 2012), Montana and Petit (2008), Patota *et al.* (2007), Smola and Sutton (2002), Tolbize (2008), Twenge and Campbell (2010), Twenge *et al.* (2010) and Wong *et al.* (2008)

**Table I.**  
Work values for  
the Baby Boom,  
Generation Xers and  
Generation Yers

This framework was developed based on a descriptive literature review of publications on high performance combined with a worldwide questionnaire (de Waal, 2006/2010, 2012a, b). The HPO Framework describes five HPO factors and 35 underlying characteristics of high performing organizations (see Appendix 1). The five HPO factors are:

- (1) Management quality: belief and trust in others and fair treatment are encouraged in the HPO. Managers are trustworthy, live with integrity, show commitment, enthusiasm, and respect, and have a decisive, action-focused decision-making style. Management holds people accountable for their results by maintaining clear accountability for performance. Values and strategy are communicated throughout the organization, so every organizational member knows and embraces these.
- (2) Openness and action orientation: the HPO has an open culture: management values the opinions of employees and involves them in important organizational processes. Mistakes are allowed and regarded as a learning opportunity. Employees spend a lot of time on dialogue, knowledge exchange, and learning to develop new ideas aimed at increasing their performance, which makes the organization performance driven. Managers are personally involved in experimenting, thereby fostering an environment of change in the organization.
- (3) Long-term orientation: the HPO grows through partnerships with suppliers and customers, as a result of which long-term commitment is extended to all stakeholders. Vacancies are filled by high-potential internal candidates first, and people are encouraged to become leaders. The HPO creates a safe and secure workplace, both physical and mental, and dismisses employees only as a last resort.
- (4) Continuous improvement and renewal: the HPO compensates for dying strategies by renewing them and making strategies unique. The organization continuously improves, simplifies and aligns its processes and innovates its products and services, creating new sources of competitive advantage to respond to market developments. Furthermore, the HPO manages its core competences efficiently and sources out non-core competences.
- (5) Employee quality: the HPO assembles and recruits a diverse and complementary management team and workforce with maximum work flexibility. The workforce is trained for resilience and flexibility. Employees are encouraged to develop their skills to accomplish extraordinary results and held responsible for their performance, as a result of which creativity increases, leading to better results.

HPO studies show that there is a direct and positive relationship between the five HPO factors and competitive performance: the higher the scores on the HPO factors the higher the results of the organization, and the lower the HPO scores the lower competitive performance is (de Waal, 2012a, b). Research also shows that an organization needs to score similarly high on all scores as all factors are equally important (de Waal, 2012a, b).

Generational research by definition looks at differences which may or may not occur between generations through time. In order to evaluate if generations perceive HPO differently it is necessary to establish whether the HPO Framework stays the same through time. After all, if this is not the case then potential differences in perception do not have to be contributed necessarily to generations, they may also be caused by differences in the HPO Framework itself. To this end, additional research was done by de Waal (2013) to examine whether the HPO factors described in the HPO Framework remain the same under changing circumstances in the business world. de Waal made a division between studies performed in or before 1995 and studies conducted after 1995. The year 1995 was taken because the “new economy” is generally considered to have started around that year. Globalization and rapid

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developments in information and communication technology changed the business economy quite dramatically, increasing the speed of business as well as competition. It turned out that nearly 90 percent of the factors of excellence and high performance were found in both studies before and after 1995. Although attention shifts for underlying HPO characteristics do occur, in general the HPO characteristics seem to qualify as “evergreens of excellence,” characteristics that are always important for creating and sustaining an HPO. This indicates that the HPO Framework as developed by de Waal (2012b) is stable. Thus, if generations turn out to look differently at HPO, then this cannot be caused by changes in the framework itself but must be attributed to generational differences.

### Research approach

The literature study by de Waal (2006/2010, 2012a, b) looked at HPO studies before and up to 2007. This means that the successful activities undertaken by organizations described in these studies must have been performed by Traditionalists (born between 1925 and 1945), Baby Boomers, and Generation Xers. In other words, Generation Yers have not had any experience with or influence on the HPO characteristics. This begs the question: do Generation Yers find other characteristics important for becoming high performing (Vinke *et al.*, 2012) than older generations do? The study described in this paper is exploratory in nature because it is the first study of its kind and because it requires the use of a convenience sample. The latter was the case because the study subject had to be an organization willing to participate in the research with employees belonging to Generation Y and at least one other generation. Such an organization was found through a contact of one of the authors, who knew a trainee of that organization. This company, a Dutch multinational (which wishes to remain anonymous) had a management trainee program for young professionals, all of Generation Y. This two-year program consisted of a series of consecutive internships, in various units of the organization. In addition, a special educational program was offered in which the trainees worked in groups on organizational problems. The program management agreed to conduct the HPO Questionnaire among the trainees and their direct supervisors. In consultation with the program management the ages of the potential respondents were checked, and it turned out that all trainees belonged to Generation Y and all supervisors, except for one, belonged to Generation X.

The HPO Questionnaire is a research tool for gathering information to assess an organization’s status in relation to the HPO. It consists of a series of questions based on the 35 HPO characteristics, which are rated on a scale of 1 (very poor at this characteristic) to 10 (excellent on this characteristic) by managers and employees. The average scores on the HPO factors indicate the areas that require special attention to improve and strengthen the internal organization in order to eventually become an HPO. At the case company, the internet-based HPO Questionnaire was distributed among the trainees and their managers, 30 in total. From these, 11 trainees and 8 managers filled in the questionnaire, which gave a response rate of 63 percent. The average scores for the five HPO factors were calculated for both trainees and managers. In addition, the attention points for the multinational were identified. The scores and the attention points were discussed with the trainees and their managers during a workshop, which was organized as part of the educational program. The purpose of the workshop was to “get the story behind the figures,” i.e. to discuss and identify why managers and trainees filled in the HPO Questionnaire as they did. After the HPO Questionnaire results were presented by the authors, the trainees and the managers split up into separate groups to discuss how they would address the attention points. Separating managers and trainees made it possible to get a feel for what Generation Xers, respectively, Generation Yers would do with the results of the HPO scores and how they would approach the attention points. Subsequently, both groups presented their ideas to each other and commented on these during a plenary meeting which was recorded by the authors. Finally, the workshop results

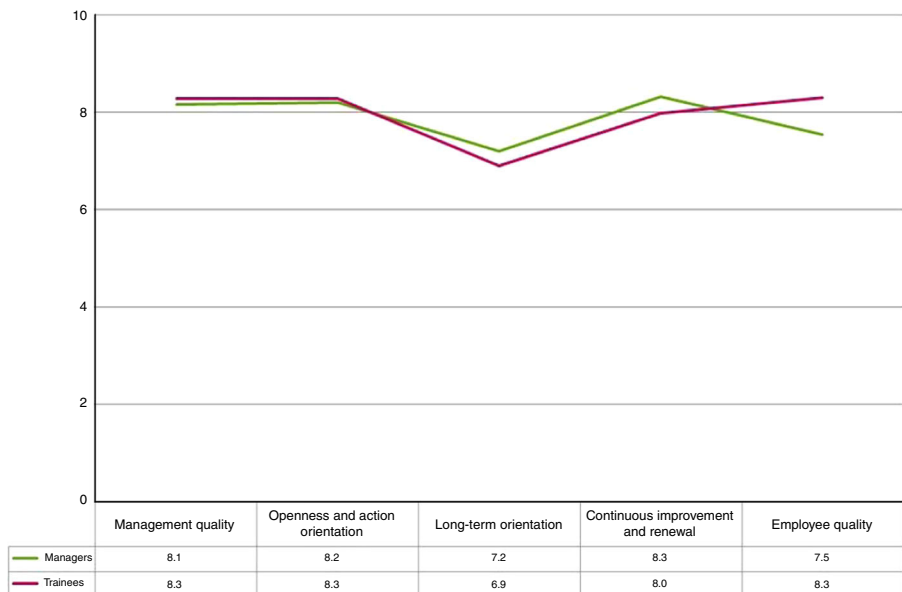
were incorporated in a presentation given by the authors several weeks later to a bigger group of trainees, their managers, and other interested managers of the company. This presentation served to check whether the workshop results were well recorded and interpreted by the authors, and subsequently it was agreed upon by the trainees and their managers.

**Research results and discussion**

The HPO Questionnaire used in this study consisted of two parts (see Appendix 1). In the first part, the respondents were asked how important they considered the HPO characteristics to be on a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 10 (very important). This part served to assess to what extent Generation Yers (the trainees) and Generation Xers (their managers) thought the same about the building blocks of high performance. In the second part of the questionnaire respondents were asked to rate how well their organization performed on the HPO characteristics, again on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (very well). This part served to evaluate to what extent the two generations shared views on the company’s performance.

*Importance*

Figure 1 depicts the degree to which trainees and their managers rated the importance of the HPO factors in general. It shows that both generations rated the importance of the HPO factors virtually the same. This included the one manager who belonged to Generation Y: he gave the same rating as his colleagues from Generation X. Moreover, the average “importance” score for all the HPO factors was equal for both groups: a 7.9. Only for the HPO factor EQ, the trainees scored considerably higher than their managers, which may have been caused by projection. As these trainees formed an elite group of employees, they may have projected their feelings of importance onto the company and, therefore, rated their own (employee) quality higher than the managers did, who most likely considered and rated the quality of the entire workforce.



**Figure 1.**  
Importance of the HPO factors, for trainees (Generation Y) and their managers (Generation X)

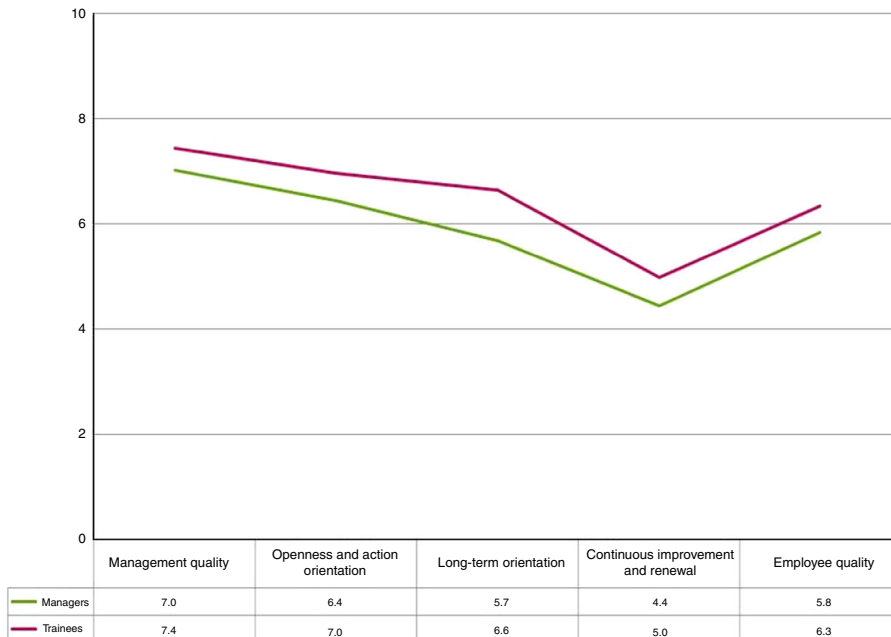
*Performance*

Figure 2 shows the scores of trainees and their managers for the organization’s performance with regard to the HPO factors. As with the above importance score, the shape of the curves is quite similar for both groups. This means that, broadly speaking, the views of trainees and managers on how the company performed largely coincided, although the managers were more critical. This may have been due to trainees still being new to the organization and having less access to comparative information than managers. The managers had worked longer at the company than the trainees and as a result may have become more realistic about the organization’s functioning. They were well aware that improvements often take more time than expected (or desired) and therefore may have scored more conservatively.

*Attention points*

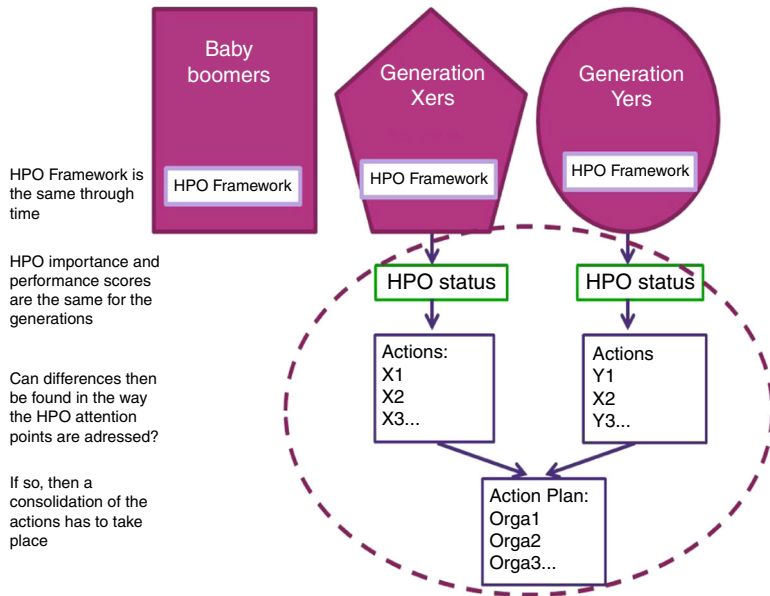
As no clear differences were found between the two groups, the next question was whether trainees and managers would address the HPO attention points differently (see Figure 3).

During the aforementioned workshop trainees and managers discussed the following three attention points: “Increase the dialogue between management and employees”; “Involve employees more during important organizational processes”; and “Improve the processes.” Possible actions to address these attention points were written down on flip-overs and presented to the participants. As it turned out, there were no substantial differences in improvement ideas and actions between the two groups. And if there was a difference, it was in the methods and tools that the two groups wanted to use to realize the improvement actions: the trainees were inclined to use social media for this more often than the managers did. During the discussions the two generations displayed basically the same attitude and motivation toward work. Only outside the workplace different attitudes regarding the optimal work/life balance were found, although this may have been due to the specific situation of an individual rather than his/her generation.



**Figure 2.** HPO scores for the organization, as given by the trainees (Generation Y) and their managers (Generation X)





**Figure 3.**  
The HPO  
generation model

*Analysis*

There are several possible explanations for the fact that the opinions of the trainees (Generation Yers) and their managers (Generation Xers) so closely matched. van der Stede (2003) found that the organizational culture of a multinational is predominant over national cultures, causing people in the organization to think uniformly. This could also be the case with the case company as it was a multinational with a long history and established routines. The trainees may have started to think in the same way as the managers who had been working longer for the company. In addition, the trainees may have adapted their behavior according to established patterns caused by the process of onboarding (i.e. organizational socialization), in which new employees acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and behaviors through training courses and other mechanisms to become effective organizational members (Bauer and Erdogan, 2011; Graybill *et al.*, 2013). As the trainees had already worked for the company for at least one year at the time of this study, it could be expected that they largely complied with the company’s standards, procedures, and work routines. An alternative but related explanation comes from Urlick (2014) and Urlick and Hollensbe (2014), who argue that people use impression management techniques to act in a way that supports their membership to a certain context, such as an organization’s culture. In this particular case, it could mean that Generation Yers acted as the Generation Xers in the organization (the “role models”) to show that they have adapted to the organization and that they “fit in.” Trainees could think this is beneficial to them because it increases their chance of being accepted in the organization. This mirroring of behavior could subsequently be reflected in the mirroring of views (and scores) on HPO.

Another consideration to take into account is that the trainees were allowed to choose which of the managers they briefly worked with would be their mentor. It is thus likely that there was a certain degree of report between trainee and manager and that, in addition to them working closely together, ideas and attitudes may have been transferred from manager to trainee. An alternative explanation is that trainees and managers independently of each other find the same things important. If both groups have followed similar

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educational paths and read the same management literature, it stands to reason that their thoughts and opinions have been shaped accordingly. Finally, an altogether different explanation is that there may not be any generational differences at all in the workplace. As Costanza *et al.* (2012) and Lyons and Kuron (2014) show in their overview articles, there is to date only modest evidence of generational differences in work attitudes found in the various studies. Costanza *et al.* (2012, p. 391) even conclude: “where generational differences do exist on work-related outcomes, they are relatively small and the inconsistent pattern of results does not support the hypothesis of systematic differences.” Other researchers (Costanza and Finkelstein, 2015; Costanza *et al.*, 2012; Elder, 1994, 1998; Lyons and Kuron, 2014; Sackett, 2002) comment that there can be many other circumstances that potentially influence the differences between people in the workplace, such as individual characteristics of people, the historical period in which a study was conducted, external environmental factors such as technology and the financial recession, changing working conditions of people, and people’s developmental changes over time.

### **Conclusion, limitations and future research**

This study’s aim was to find an answer to the research question:

*RQ2.* Do different generations look differently at HPO, and if so, in what ways?

The research results clearly show that, for the two generations present in the research population (Generations X and Y), there was no significant difference in their views on HPO, the importance they attached to the HPO characteristics, their performance scores for the company, and their improvement actions. It seems therefore that, in this case, the opponents of the existence of generational differences in the workplace are supported. As Costanza and Finkelstein (2015, p. 321) remark: “There is little solid empirical evidence supporting the existence of generationally based differences, almost no theory supporting any reason behind such differences, and plenty of viable alternate explanations for any differences that are observed. Instead of relying on unsupported stereotypes, we argue – as others have before us – which organizations should focus on real, impactful, and actual differences among workers and should strongly resist the temptation to implement talent management and HR strategies that are based on unsupported and ill-defined ideas about the characteristics of groups of people.” Therefore the practical implication of this research result is foremost that managers who manage a multigenerational workforce should not approach and treat people differently because of the generation they belong to. Instead, they should view people as individuals with their own particular quirks who will change over time because of changes in their private lives and working lives. Managers should therefore really get to know their employees – their individual strengths, weaknesses, personalities and expectations – and treat them accordingly and not according to generational stereotypes (Urlick, 2014; Urlick and Hollensbe, 2014). In the same vein, the HR department should develop human resources processes that take into account individual differences of employees and thus not a “one size fits all for a generation” approach. Another practical implication specific for the application of the HPO Framework, is that an organization does not have to spend time convincing groups of people, distinguished by generation, of the importance of HPO. As people of every generation look in the same way at high performance, an organization can right away start the transition. Thus, the CEO mentioned at the beginning of the paper does not have to be afraid that the younger generation will not contribute its fair share to creating an HPO. However, managers should turn to their trainees to look for new and innovative ways and application of tools to strengthen the HO factors, as the research has shown that there are differences in approaches that each generation proposes to use when improving the HPO characteristics.

The obvious limitation to this study is the limited research population. In total, 19 people on a workforce of 20,000 is hardly representative, although they did come from all over the organization. In this respect, the study findings could at least be called (but at the same time also at most) indicative. Further research could replicate the study, both at the multinational with the new cohorts of trainees in the years to come, and at other organizations. In both cases a larger research population should be targeted and also preferably three instead of two generations. Furthermore, the respondents in this study were not asked to rate the HPO characteristics according to priority; this could have given different orders of importance for both groups and should therefore also be investigated in future studies. As this study was performed solely at a Dutch multinational, future research could also apply the same study design at companies in other countries, to check whether national cultures may affect work values and the way generations look at HPO. A final limitation is a variation on the “age-period-cohort” issue in which generational differences could be explained by age-related effects (i.e. maturation), cohort effects (i.e. formative context), or the conditions of the historical period in which data were gathered (Costanza and Finkelstein, 2015). The variation in this study is the job level: as all Generation Xers are supervisors and all Generation Yers trainees, we might have been testing differences between jobs instead of between generations. This is a difficult limitation to get around, as the youngest generation almost by definition will have lower-level jobs compared to older generations. The way to deal with this limitation is to try to find an organization (probably a fairly young one) where there is a mix of generations at the various job levels.

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### Appendix 1

This appendix lists the 35 characteristics of the five HPO factors, with the scores for importance and performance, as given by the trainees and their managers. The importance score reflects how important trainees and managers think an HPO characteristic is for an organization in general. The performance score reflects how well, in the eyes of trainees and managers, their company performed on the HPO characteristic. The first column in the table shows the HPO factors to which the HPO characteristics belong.

Factor	Aspect	Characteristic	Trainees		Managers	
			Importance	Performance	Importance	Performance
Continuous improvement	1	Our organization has adopted a strategy that sets it clearly apart from other organizations	8.4	4.2	9.1	3.9
Continuous improvement	2	In our organization processes are continuously improved	7.8	6.1	8.5	5.4
Continuous improvement	3	In our organization processes are continuously simplified	7.7	4.5	7.9	3.8
Continuous improvement	4	In our organization processes are continuously aligned	8.0	4.8	7.9	4.3
Continuous improvement	5	In our organization everything that matters to the organization's performance is explicitly reported	7.8	5.1	8.3	4.4
Continuous improvement	6	In our organization both financial and non-financial information is reported to organizational members	8.3	5.5	8.5	5.6
Continuous improvement	7	Our organization continuously innovates its core competencies	8.0	4.6	8.8	4.0
Continuous improvement	8	Our organization continuously innovates its products, processes and services	7.8	5.2	7.6	4.3
Openness and action orientation	9	The management of our organization frequently engages in a dialogue with employees	8.3	6.6	8.0	5.9
Openness and action orientation	10	Organizational members spend much time on communication, knowledge exchange and learning	8.2	5.3	8.1	5.6
Openness and action orientation	11	Organizational members are always involved in important processes	7.5	5.5	7.3	3.9
Openness and action orientation	12	The management of our organization allows making mistakes	8.4	7.7	8.3	8.3
Openness and action orientation	13	The management of our organization welcomes change	8.9	8.8	9.0	8.4
Openness and action orientation	14	Our organization is performance driven	8.5	7.8	8.5	6.6
Management quality	15	The management of our organization is trusted by organizational members	8.2	7.4	7.9	6.8
Management quality	16	The management of our organization has integrity	8.7	8.4	9.5	8.5
Management quality	17	The management of our organization is a role model for organizational members	8.2	7.2	8.0	8.1
Management quality	18	The management of our organization applies fast decision making	8.4	7.6	8.1	6.8
Management quality	19	The management of our organization applies fast action taking	8.2	7.7	8.0	7.5

**Table AI.**  
The HPO factors and accompanying characteristics

*(continued)*

Factor	Aspect	Characteristic	Trainees		Managers	
			Importance	Performance	Importance	Performance
Management quality	20	The management of our organization coaches organizational members to achieve better results	8.4	6.5	8.1	6.6
Management quality	21	The management of our organization focuses on achieving results	8.2	8.2	8.8	7.6
Management quality	22	The management of our organization is very effective	8.3	7.5	8.0	6.6
Management quality	23	The management of our organization applies strong leadership	8.5	5.9	8.6	5.4
Management quality	24	The management of our organization is confident	8.3	8.3	7.6	7.5
Management quality	25	The management of our organization is decisive with regard to non-performers	8.1	7.0	7.9	6.4
Employee quality	26	The management of our organization always holds organizational members responsible for their results	8.0	7.6	7.3	6.5
Employee quality	27	The management of our organization inspires organizational members to accomplish extraordinary results	8.4	7.9	7.8	7.5
Employee quality	28	Organizational members are trained to be resilient and flexible	7.5	5.7	7.3	5.4
Employee quality	29	Our organization has a diverse and complementary workforce	8.6	6.2	7.9	5.8
Long-term orientation	30	Our organization grows through partnerships with suppliers and/or customers	8.6	5.5	7.3	4.8
Long-term orientation	31	Our organization maintains good and long-term relationships with all stakeholders	8.5	5.9	8.3	3.5
Long-term orientation	32	Our organization is aimed at servicing the customers as best as possible	8.8	6.4	8.9	4.6
Long-term orientation	33	The management of our organization has been with the company for a long time	4.7	7.2	4.8	6.8
Long-term orientation	34	New management is promoted from within the organization	4.9	7.5	6.1	7.1
Long-term orientation	35	Our organization is a secure workplace for organizational members	7.5	6.2	8.0	6.4
		Average scores	7.9	6.5	7.9	5.9

Table AI.

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