

## Work Values-Career Commitment Relationship of Generation Y Teachers in Malaysia

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**Abstract.** This research aims at identifying the preferred work values and career commitment of Generation Y teachers in Malaysia, as well as the moderating effect of cultural orientation on the work values-career commitment relationship of Generation Y teachers. It was hypothesized that Generation Y teachers in Malaysia would embrace intrinsic work values as discovered in studies done in Western countries, and the choice of work values will impact on career commitment of these teachers. It was also hypothesized that cultural orientation would influence the choice of preferred work values, and affect the level of career commitment of teachers. A random sample of 118 teachers was drawn from one of the teacher training institutions in Malaysia. Data was collected by self-administered questionnaires containing psychometrically sound scales to measure the work values, career commitment, and cultural orientation of the sample. Findings suggested that Generation Y teachers in Malaysia preferred security and environmental work values, which is different from the findings carried out in Western countries, and work values explain 17% of the variance of career commitment. In addition, intrinsic work values are correlated to career commitment at  $r = .36$ . Cultural orientation is also found to have significant impact on the work values-career commitment relationship of Generation Y teachers, although it accounts for only 1% of the increase in the variance explained. Theoretical and practical implications of the research were discussed, and suggestions for future research were given.

**Keywords:** Career Commitment, Work Values, Generation Y, Malaysia.

### 1. Introduction

Commitment is an important quality of a good teacher. Teacher engagement and commitment have impact on teachers' quality, adaptability, attendance, retention, attitudes and burnout. Committed teachers influence not only the quality and outcome of students, but also serve as a model of values, attitudes and behaviors to students. It is believed that commitment of teachers is greatly affected by work values of individuals, teachers' desire for skill improvement (Weiner & Vardi, 1980) and cultural orientation of individuals (Hofstede, 1980). In addition, Johnson (2002) contented that age cohort can influence the work values chosen by individuals.

Super (1995) defined values as refinement of needs when an individual interacts and socializes with the environment, and work values are seen as "the hierarchical organization of relatively stable needs, desires, and goals as applied to the world of work" (Super, 1995, p. 54). Schwartz (1992) proposed that values have five features: (1) values are beliefs; (2) values imply desirable end states of behaviors; (3) values influence selection of and evaluation of behaviors and events; (4) values remain stable across context and time; and (5) values can be ranked in terms of relative importance.

Blau (1985) conceptualized career commitment as an attitude of individuals towards their profession. Career commitment measures the extent to which a person wishes to experience development and advancement in his or her career, and this decision is unrelated to the employing organization. It is the strength of one's motivation to remain in a chosen career role, and it encompasses career choice and career growth (Hall, 1971). Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990) asserted that work committed individuals seek

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occupational specialization. Career commitment is believed to be determined by culture, and is stable over time.

Hofstede (1980) interpreted culture as the “learned programming of the mind”. One aspect of culture is cultural orientation, which refers to individualism and collectivism. Cultural orientation is believed to be important in defining work commitment among younger generations (McMurray, 2003). It is believed that culture shapes the values and beliefs of individuals, which influence individuals’ attitudes and behaviors. Triandis (2001) elaborated that collectivism occurs when the self is “an aspect of a collective”, and “personal goals are subordinated to the goals of this collective” (p.409). Collective societies give preference to relationship, respect for superior, organizational pride, and job security (Kirkman & Shapiro, 2001). On the other hand, individualism asserts that “the individual is autonomous from group” (Triandis, Cahn, Bhawuk, Iwao, & Sinba, 1995, p. 461). In individualistic societies, the core values are individual achievement, self-reliance, belief in equality of opportunity, competitiveness, hard work, materialism, informality, directness, timeliness, and believe that change is good (Harris, Moran & Moran, 2004).

Age cohort or generations refer to recognizable groups of individuals that share a common history and significant life events at critical developmental stages (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Generation Y (Gen Y-ers) are born after 1980, and due to differences in the life experiences of Gen Y-ers, it is believed that they embrace different work values as compared to other generations. Gen Y-ers are generally labeled as generation that are more individualistic, and prefer intrinsic work values such as work autonomy, work identity, challenging jobs, and self-expression (Johnson, 2002). Research in Western countries confirmed the above contention (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998; van de Velde, Mandy, Feiji & Emmerik, 1988; Yankelovich, 1994; Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002).

In this paper, age factor is controlled, and all respondents are Gen Y-ers who were born after 1980. The present paper is a follow-up to the research on the relationship between work values, career commitment, and cultural orientation, and it contributes to the literature on the above topics. Specifically, the paper aims to identify work values of Generation Y teachers. The paper also assesses the relationship between the preferred work values of Generation Y teachers and their level of career commitment, with cultural orientation (individualism versus collectivism) as a moderator.

Previous research on work values, work commitment, and cultural orientation of the younger generations has mostly relied on the Western sample. There has been little evidence of empirical research (Cohen, 2003; Lim, Pek & Yee, 2008) on Generation Y teachers in Malaysia in relation to work values, career commitment and cultural orientation. Generation Y teachers play a critical role in the quality of service and also the success of schools. The significance of the study hinges upon the fact that it integrates work values and career commitment in order to better understand their impact on Generation Y. This research is important given the fact that the one of the main thrust under Ninth Malaysia plan (2006-2010) is to improve Malaysia’s capacity for knowledge, creativity, and nurture “first class mentality”. The former Prime Minister, Dato’ Seri Abdullah Badawi views the future success of Malaysia relies on its human capital’s quality in terms of intellect and character. In order to produce high quality of competent knowledge workers, Malaysia needs to upgrade its education institution by raising the quality of academics in terms of leadership, expertise and their level of commitment. As a country that is embarking and investing in its human capital, Malaysia is seen as an education hub providing courses tailored to satisfy both local and international’s needs and expectations. Education is therefore important to national economies as it provides high technology knowledge workers to meet the demands of the high technology era. This is the key challenge of the Malaysian education system that needs to be highlighted. Therefore it is necessary for Malaysian school principals to understand the Malaysian Generation Y so that they can plan and implement human resource functions related to young generations of teachers, as well as managing the young generations of teachers more effectively.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Development of Hypotheses**

Work values are formed early in one’s life, during adolescence and early years of work (Lindsay & Knox, 1984; Mortimer & Lorence, 1979). They are believed to be best understood as a combination of both

individual and workplace factors (Brief & Nord, 1990; Cassirer & Reskin, 2000). It is the meaning an individual attaches to the work role (Kalleberg, 1977; Tilly & Tilly, 1998), that is, it is what workers value, from a list of alternatives, out of their working experiences. The differential value systems determine the roles and positions each individual select him-/herself within the labor market (Halaby, 2003; Mortimer, Pimentel, Ryu, Nash & Lee, 1996). In Super's (1970) work values questionnaire, he included fifteen work values, which are: creativity, management, achievement, work environment, supervisory relationships, lifestyle, security, coworkers, aesthetic, prestige, independence, variety, income, altruism, and intellectual stimulation. Researches (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998; van de Velde, Mandy, Feiji & Emmerik, 1988; Yankelovich, 1994; Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002) proposed that Gen X-ers preferred intrinsic work values. Thus, we offer the following hypothesis:

*H1: Generation Y teachers have the tendency to choose intrinsic work values as the preferred work values.*

Several research viewed work values as important variables in explaining the level of commitment of individuals (Kidron, 1978; Putti, Aryee & Liang, 1989). This is because commitment is considered as a manifestation of the individual's own self, and it reflects the value standards chosen by each individual (Werkmeister, 1967). Kidron proposed a moderate relationship between work values and work commitment (Kidron, 1978), while Putti, Aryee and Liang (1989) argued that intrinsic work values relate closely to the level of commitment of individuals. Thus, we propose that

*H2: Intrinsic work values correlate with career commitment of Generation Y teachers.*

Studies (Hofstede, 1980; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998; Yao & Wang, 2006) discovered that there are significant differences in beliefs and values among people of individualistic and collective national cultures. Hartung, Speight, and Lewis (1996) examined the effects of collectivism and individualism within a cultural group on occupational choices, career plans, and work values. They contended that collectivistically-oriented individuals would endorse more group-linked work values (e.g. interpersonal relations, altruism). However, Hartung Speight and Lewis (1996) could not find anything of practical significance between work values and cultural orientation. Collectivism is the dominant value of Malaysia, with individualism as a sub-culture. In a recent study, Kennedy (2002) reported that Malaysia is a collective society, and the work values held by Malaysians reflect the cultural orientation existed within the society. Therefore

*H3: Cultural orientation (collectivism and individualism) moderates the preferred work values of Generation Y teachers, and career commitment of Generation Y teachers.*

### **3. Method**

Data was collected from a random sample of 118 Generation Y teachers in one of the teacher training institutions in Malaysia. The questionnaire was distributed personally by the researchers to the teachers in their individual classes. A total of 118 feedbacks were received, of which 17 sets were unusable due to incomplete responses. Hence the final response rate of useable questionnaires was 85.6%. The results of the survey were analyzed by means of a quantitative data analysis software package (SPSS). About two third of respondents were female (65.3%). The respondents were mostly Chinese (49.5%), followed by Malays (32.7%), and Indians (17.8%). A 45-item scale measuring work values was adopted from Work Values Inventory developed by Super (1970). Career commitment was measured by Blau's (1985) scale, which consists of ten items rated on a five-point scale. The moderating effect of culture on work values was measured using Triandis Scenario Method (Triandis, 2004), which is a sixteen-item scale that uses scenarios with multiple-choice response format.

### **4. Results**

The mean value of the coefficient  $\alpha$  of the Work Values scale was .89, demonstrating high internal consistency reliabilities. Correlation value of work value items ranges from .04 to .75. Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax Rotation was conducted to reduce the Work Values scales into three factors: the environmental aspect (eigenvalue=5.53, 36.87% of variance), the intrinsic aspect (eigenvalue=1.91, 12.71% of variance) and the security aspect (eigenvalue=1.22, 8.14% of variance). The coefficient  $\alpha$  of career commitment is .47, with the mean stood at 3.4. Correlation analysis of career commitment scale shows that

all items are lowly and moderately correlated, with the highest correlation level at  $r = .56$ . The frequencies for cultural orientation of the sample are: vertical collectivism = 21(20.8%), horizontal collectivism = 50(49.5%), vertical individualism = 12(11.9%), and horizontal individualism = 18(17.8%). Descriptive analysis reveals that the preferred work values of Generation Y teachers is supervisory relation (mean = 4.37), followed by achievement (4.26), way of life (4.19), surroundings and altruism (4.18), associates (4.09), prestige (4.01), creativity and economic return (3.98), security (3.94), independence (3.80), intellectual simulation (3.75), aesthetic (3.69), variety (3.69), and management (3.54). The result is different from that of the findings in Western countries. The level of career commitment of the Generation Y teachers is moderate (mean = 3.4), and the major cultural orientation of the Generation Y teachers is horizontal collectivism (49.5%), which shows that collectivism is the dominant culture.

Using the summated scores of the three aspects of work values (environmental=4.24, intrinsic=3.74, security=4.29), a model was obtained, which revealed that the independent variables (work values) explains 17 per cent of the variance (R squared) of career commitment, and the relationship is significant, as indicated by the F-value of 6.635 in Table 1. When taking cultural orientation into consideration, the independent variables (work values and cultural orientation) explain 18 per cent of the variance (R squared) of career commitment, and the relationship is significant, as indicated by the F-value of 5.281 in Table 1. However, the changes in R square for Model 1 and Model 2 is only 1%, and the percentage of total variance explained is small (17%), this means that there are other more important variables that affect the level of career commitment of Generation Y teachers in Malaysia. An examination of the t-values indicates that intrinsic work values contribute significantly to career commitment of individuals ( $t = 4.39, p > .05$ ). On the other hand, cultural orientation does not contribute significantly to career commitment of individuals ( $t = 1.09, p > .05$ ).

Table 1: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.721	3	.907	6.635	.000(a)
	Residual	13.121	96	.137		
	Total	15.842	99			
2	Regression	2.882	4	.720	5.281	.001(b)
	Residual	12.960	95	.136		
	Total	15.842	99			

a Predictors: (Constant), Security, Intrinsic, Environmental

b Predictors: (Constant), Security, Intrinsic, Environmental, Cultural Orientation

c Dependent Variable: Career Commitment

## 5. Discussions and Conclusions

The findings of the research revealed that the preferred work values of Generation Y teachers are environmental (surrounding, association, and relations) and security (independence, economic, way of life, security and prestige). The findings confirm that intrinsic work values are correlated to career commitment ( $r = .36$ ), and that intrinsic work values have significant impact on career commitment of individuals. It also reveals that work values explain 17% of the level of career commitment of Generation Y teachers, and that cultural orientation is significant in explaining the level of career commitment of Generation Y teachers. The results imply that the findings in Western countries which states that younger generations preferred intrinsic work values are not applicable in Malaysia. However, the contention that intrinsic work values impact on career commitment is supported, and that cultural orientation does affect the work values chosen, and the level of career commitment of Generation Y teachers in Malaysia. The study also confirmed that Malaysia is a collective society, with horizontal collectivism as the most common type of orientation. The findings imply that school principals should inculcate intrinsic work values among young generations of teachers, if they wish to increase career commitment of young teachers, so that Malaysia can achieve its Vision 2020, that is, to become an advanced nation in the year 2020 and to gain the status of an international education hub. Alternatively, to increase the productivity of young teachers, school principals need to use extrinsic motivation to motivate them. In addition, school principals should apply the knowledge that Generation Y teachers give preference to relationship and job security, to manage Generation Y teachers effectively.

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