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Different or alike?

Exploring the psychological contract and commitment of different generations of hospitality workers

Psychological
contract and
commitment

553

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to explore generational differences in the psychological contract of hospitality employees and work outcomes such as commitment and turnover intention.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected in 20 hotels ($n = 359$) from a four-star hotel chain in The Netherlands using a self-administered questionnaire. Data were analysed using MANOVA and *post-hoc* analysis.

Findings – Findings suggest that opportunities for development and challenge, variation and responsibility are more important to younger generations of hospitality workers. Generation X placed high value on work-life balance, autonomy and job security. No differences were found for work atmosphere, salary and task description. Significantly lower commitment and higher turnover intention was also found for Generation Y.

Practical implications – The findings provide insight into generational differences in expectations that hospitality workers have of their employers. This helps managers in developing management styles as well as human resource policy to better address these expectations.

Originality/value – This study is one of the first to explore the psychological contract in a hospitality context and contributes empirical evidence to the body of knowledge on generational differences.

Keywords Generation, Psychological contract, Job commitment, Employees turnover, Hospitality, Hotels, The Netherlands

Paper type Research paper



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1. Introduction

High voluntary staff turnover is a common and costly problem in the hospitality industry (Barron, 2008; Gustafson, 2002; Solnet and Hood, 2008). Reasons mentioned for this high turnover include factors such as low pay, antisocial working hours, menial work and limited career opportunities (Barron, 2008; Davidson *et al.*, 2011; Kusluvan and Kusluvan, 2000; Walsh and Taylor, 2007). Hospitality staff is increasingly leaving the hospitality industry for jobs in industries with better working conditions (Barron, 2008; Blomme *et al.*, 2008; Blomme *et al.*, 2009). Some authors even suggest a turnover culture in hospitality business with organizations accepting turnover as “just the way things are” (Iverson and Deery, 1997; Kusluvan, 2003). Reducing turnover is however beneficial to the industry; several scholars have argued that investment in and retention of human capital creates sustainable competitive advantage for businesses (Barney, 1997; Murphy and Olsen, 2008). Moreover, the turnover problem seems to be compounded by demographical developments. The combination of an ageing population and falling birth rates over the last decades has resulted in a shrinking labor pool (Magd, 2003; Sparrow and Hiltrop, 1994). Given the traditionally high numbers of younger employees in hospitality business, this raises an important concern for an industry already plagued by high turnover rates (Deery, 2002).

In particular, a new generation of employees with an apparently different attitude, has been entering the hospitality industry for a few years now (Barron, 2008). Generation Y workers in other industries have been reported to have lower levels of commitment to their organization than previous generations, resulting in higher staff turnover (Lancaster and Stillman, 2005; Martin and Tulgan, 2001; Twenge, 2007).

Key to understanding why employees leave their organization is their psychological contract with the organization (Rousseau, 1989; Blomme *et al.*, 2010). The psychological contract is defined as “an employee’s beliefs about the reciprocal obligations between that employee and his or her organization, where these obligations are based on perceived promises and not necessarily recognized by agents of the organization” (Morrison and Robinson, 1997, p. 229). These beliefs thus refer to the way the employment contract is interpreted, understood and enacted by employees (Millward and Brewerton, 2000) and forms a psychological filter between the actual working conditions, and an employee’s responses. The psychological contract can therefore be considered an important antecedent for employee commitment and turnover intention, and ultimately turnover (Bal *et al.*, 2008; Blau, 1964; Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Thompson and Bunderson, 2003).

In this paper we argue that different generations will perceive their psychological contract differently. Generational are shaped by societal events in a formative phase of their lives that influence their values (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008; Ng *et al.*, 2010; Smola and Sutton, 2002). These values are considered to play a central role in the perception and evaluation of experiences in the workplace (Dawis and Lofquist, 1984) and therefore will influence their perception and evaluation of the psychological contract (De Vos *et al.*, 2003).

We therefore propose that different generations will hold different psychological contracts with their employers, and will value aspects of their psychological contract differently.

The current study adds to the literature in several ways. First, it explores the psychological contract in a hospitality context. The psychological contract has been

regarded as a relevant construct to explain important employee behaviors such as commitment, turnover, and organizational citizenship behaviors (De Vos *et al.*, 2003). Very few studies to date have explored the psychological contract in a hospitality setting (Blomme *et al.*, 2010; Kelley-Patterson and George, 2001). Second, Solnet and Hood (2008) called for research into the impact of the new generation of employees entering the hospitality workforce. Although stereotypes abound, very little empirical research has been done to clarify differences (Giancola, 2006). This study aims to contribute by exploring how hospitality employees of different generations perceive their psychological contract. Furthermore, the study contributes empirical evidence to test popular stereotypes about different generations in a hospitality setting for important work outcomes such as organizational commitment and turnover intention.

2. Literature

Mannheim (1972), though not the first to write about the concept of generations, created a definition that still forms the basis for modern thinking about generations. He defines a generation as a group of people in a similar social location experiencing similar social events (Mannheim, 1972). According to Mannheim, people belonging to a generation not only physically exist in the same time in history, but also share and perceive the same experiences, forming value sets in a formative phase early in life (between age 16-25) that remain with the people from that generation for the remainder of their lives. These value sets also influence work values and expectations that people may have of their employers (Chen and Choi, 2008; Ng *et al.*, 2010). This is potentially important for hospitality companies: the practitioner literature suggests generational differences impacts all areas of management, including recruitment, training and development, career development, rewards and working arrangements and management style (Losyk, 1997; McDonald and Hite, 2008; Tulgan, 1996, 2003).

Several authors have found support for generational differences and offer explanations for these differences based on shared social experiences (Bontekoning, 2007; Dries *et al.*, 2008; Howe and Strauss, 1991, 2007; Lancaster and Stillman, 2005). Also, Smola and Sutton (2002) found in a longitudinal study that work values were more influenced by generational experiences than by biological age. Finally, Howe and Strauss (1991, 2007) suggest that early values and expectations may alter as people move into a new life-stage, but also demonstrate that each generation does so in their own way. This would suggest that there is an interaction between life-stage and generational effects. Furthermore, Parry and Urwin (2011) also suggest there maybe variation within generational cohorts based on distinctions such as gender and education that will impact work-related attitudes and behaviors.

Although some variation exists on the exact naming of these generations and the specific start and end dates of each generational cohort, there appears to be a general descriptive consensus among academics and practitioners regarding the following generations: Baby Boomers (born 1945-1964), Generation X (born 1965-1980) and Generation Y (born after 1980) (Eisner, 2005; Martin and Tulgan, 2001; Raines, 2003). The focus in this article will be on the last three generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. Together, they encompass the vast majority of the workforce in the hospitality industry.

2.1 Baby boomers (born 1945-1964)

Baby boomers are demographically a large group (39 percent) in the general workforce (CBS, 2010), but constitute a minority in the hospitality workforce. In the hospitality industry, less than 15 percent of the workforce consists of Baby Boomers (Rijnders and Lub, 2011). The current literature (Eisner, 2005; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Lancaster and Stillman, 2005; Smola and Sutton, 2002) suggests that Baby Boomer employees value job security and a stable work environment. Other descriptions of this generation include loyalty to an organization, idealism and ambition (Wong *et al.*, 2008). Baby Boomers are also suggested to be focused on consensus building and mentoring. Lastly, they are suggested to be very sensitive to status (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

2.2 Generation X (born 1965-1980)

Generation X employees, a relatively small demographic cohort, are often depicted as cynical, pessimistic and individualistic (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002). Also, they are often described as entrepreneurial, independent, comfortable with change, and less loyal to an employer (Yu and Miller, 2005). As a result of an economic crisis in their formative years, Generation X are more likely to leave a job in search of more challenging work environments or, higher pay as previous generations (Deal *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, they are considered to have a less respect for authority (Howe and Strauss, 2007). Lastly, they are often reported to have difficulty dealing with disappearing boundaries between work and private life and, as a result, finding a good work-life balance (Eisner, 2005; Gursoy *et al.*, 2008).

2.3 Generation Y (born > 1980)

Generation Y is currently the largest generation (63 percent) in the Dutch hospitality workforce, as is probably true for most of the western world. Generation Y is described as being very comfortable with change (Rijnders and Lub, 2011; Eisner, 2005; Tulgan, 2003). Generation Y also appears to value personal development and enjoy challenging work (Eisner, 2005). Comparable to Baby Boomers, they are also considered to be optimistic, driven, and even more goal oriented and demanding of the work environment than Generation X (Boschma and Groen, 2007; Smola and Sutton, 2002; Twenge and Campbell, 2008). Similarly, Generation Y has been reported to be less committed to their organization and more likely to leave if not satisfied (Twenge *et al.*, 2010).

Given that the demographic mix of generations is shifting in the workforce, it is important to assess what impact this may have in the hospitality industry (Barron, 2008; Solnet and Hood, 2008). Although research on this topic is scarce, a study by Chen and Choi (2008) focused on generational differences in work values in the hospitality industry and found dimensions of personal growth and work environment to be significantly different among generations. Although these work values do give some indications of generational differences, a closely related theoretical construct, the psychological contract, may provide further insight into what different generations of workers expect from their employers. Whereas work values tend to be more abstract, the psychological contract provides a more concrete outlook on employee expectations in relation to their work. Moreover, the understanding of staff turnover, an important outcome variable for hospitality business, in relation to the employer-employee

relationship is approached by many academics from the perspective of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1989; Ten Brink, 2004; Tekleab and Taylor, 2003).

As mentioned before, the psychological contract is defined as “an employee’s beliefs about the reciprocal obligations between that employee and his or her organization, where these obligations are based on perceived promises and not necessarily recognized by agents of the organization” (Morrison and Robinson, 1997, p. 229). In other words, employees have certain beliefs about what an employee should offer, and what he or she should offer in return.

The psychological contract is founded on social exchange theory, which suggests that employees and employers engage in exchanges whereby each party to the exchange reciprocates the other’s contributions (Blau, 1964). This norm of reciprocity also dictates that not fulfilling these obligations may lead employees to reciprocate by adapting their contributions (reducing their organizational citizenship behaviors and in-role performance (Zhao *et al.*, 2007; Lub *et al.*, 2011); lowering commitment or even to leaving their job; Bal *et al.*, 2010; Conway and Briner, 2005; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994).

Rousseau (2001) suggests that antecedents of psychological contracts are activated to a large extent through pre-employment experiences such as societal events. The psychological contract literature has however thus far largely ignored societal dimensions of social relationships (Cullinane and Dundon, 2006). Bal *et al.* (2008) also suggest that specific types of psychological contracts may be age-related. Although they draw no conclusions about generational differences, they do suggest that, since most psychological contract studies have been performed over the last twenty years, it cannot be determined if age-effects are a consequence of aging or of generational cohort change.

The relationship between psychological contract and commitment has been well documented in the literature (Coyle-Shapiro *et al.*, 2004; Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Ten Brink, 2004). According to Meyer *et al.* (1993) commitment is a psychological state that characterizes the employee’s relationship with the organization. Three types of commitment are generally distinguished: affective, normative and continuance commitment. Affective commitment is defined as “the employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization”, normative commitment refers to “a feeling of obligation with the organization” and continuance commitment is defined as “an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization” (Meyer and Allen, 1991, p. 67). There has however been some theoretical debate on the use of normative commitment. First of all, normative commitment (NC) correlates strongly with affective commitment (AC) and its predictive value for outcome variables seems to be rather limited in comparison to affective commitment (Bergman, 2006; Jaros, 2007). Moreover, since the introduction of the concept of normative commitment by Allen and Meyer (1990) the definition of normative commitment has changed regularly. Whereas the original normative commitment scale captured an internalization of social loyalty norms to the organization, more recent definitions of NC reflect reciprocity for a benefit (Bergman, 2006; Jaros, 2007; Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Solinger *et al.*, 2008), a concept essentially similar to the psychological contract explored in this study. Normative commitment was therefore not included in this study. Also, affective and, to a lesser extent, continuance

commitment have also been strongly related to turnover intention, job performance and actual turnover (Jaros, 1997; McElroy, 2001; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001).

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, commitment has been related to a range of outcome measures. Moreover, turnover intention is important for this study. Staff turnover is a well-known problem for hospitality operators (Barron, 2008; Solnet and Hood, 2008). If indeed a shift has taken place in the workplace and job security has been replaced by employability (De Meuse and Tornow, 1990; Roehling *et al.*, 2000; Ten Brink, 2004), one would expect not only differences in the content of the psychological contract. In fact, if the employer does not meet psychological contract obligations, employees seem to act in response. If generations do indeed have different expectations from their employers, it can be expected that outcome measures would score differently for different generations.

Our research questions therefore are:

RQ1. Do different generations value different aspects of their psychological contract? We would expect to see differences with Baby-Boomers preferring job security, Generation X workers valuing work-life balance and Generation Y specifically looking for stimulation in their jobs, including developmental opportunities and room to grow.

RQ2. Do younger generations show lower levels of commitment? Given the literature, we would expect specifically Generation Y to have lower levels of both affective and continuance commitment.

RQ3. Do younger generations show a higher turnover intention? In line with lowered affective and continuance commitment, we would expect Generation Y to have a higher turnover intention.

3. Methods

3.1 Procedure

A survey was distributed to 1,059 employees of a large Dutch hotel chain, consisting of 20 four-star hotels in both city center and rural locations. HR-representatives in the different hotels, assisted by a researcher, distributed the questionnaire to all staff members and stimulated colleagues to fill in the questionnaire. Surveys were provided with a return envelope with the researcher's address, allowing respondents to participate anonymously. All departments participated except for the housekeeping department, which was outsourced to another company. Respondents were asked to rate all the statements on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Next to the main variables psychological contract, commitment and turnover we controlled for other demographic variables in our main analyses, such as gender and education level.

3.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 358 respondents (response 34 percent). A total of 43 per cent of the respondents were male and 57 percent female. A total of 52 percent of the sample belonged to Generation Y, 36 percent to Generation X, and 12 percent of the respondents was Baby Boomer. Fifteen per cent of the respondents had a low education level, 52 percent a middle and 33 percent a high education level. These sample statistics are largely representative for a Dutch hotel staff population, except for the education

level that was higher than average for hotel staff (outsourcing of the housekeeping department in this hotel chain reduced the number of respondents with low education in the sample).

3.3 Measures

The instrument used in this study consisted of three sections. The first section captured demographic information such as age, gender and education. The second section consisted of fifty-nine items and was based on Ten Brink's (2004) validated psychological contract questionnaire that offers a detailed breakdown of different dimensions of the psychological contract (Blomme *et al.*, 2010). The eight dimensions include:

- (1) Stimulating job (personal development, training opportunities and challenging work).
- (2) Job security.
- (3) Intra-organizational mobility.
- (4) Work-life balance.
- (5) Work atmosphere (both referring to team relationship and relationship with the organization).
- (6) Autonomy.
- (7) Salary.
- (8) Task description.

Items were posed as statements and read "I find it important that my employer offers me [...] (i.e. challenging work)." Respondents were asked to rate their answers on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Details on dimensions and sample items can be found in Table I.

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the 56 items. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2 = 9851, p < 0.001$) and the KMO measure of sampling adequacy (0.943) both indicated sufficient interdependence among items to warrant factor-analyzing them. All items with a factor loading above 0.40 and with eigenvalues greater than 1 were included in the construct (Stevens, 1992; Field, 2009). Three items were eliminated due to low factor loadings. The remaining items yielded an 8-factor solution (varimax rotation) based on a typical 1.0-eigenvalue cut-off. These eight factors explained 68 percent of the variance in the variables. The Cronbach's alpha values for the eight dimensions of Psychological Contract indicate a sufficient scale reliability, with alpha values ranging from 0.73-0.94 (Nunnally, 1978). Table I lists the items comprising the eight dimensions, their factor loadings, eigenvalues and explained variance.

In the third section, we measured the work outcome variables. Affective commitment and continuance commitment are based on well-known scales by Meyer and Allen (1991). Three items for affective commitment are used and three items for continuance commitment. Sample items for affective commitment and continuance commitment are respectively "I feel strongly attached to the organization" and "It would cost me too much if I were to leave the organization shortly." Affective and Continuance Commitment scales had a good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.92$ and $\alpha = 0.76$ respectively). Turnover intention was also measured by three items based on a scale by Ten Brink (2004). A sample item for turnover intention is "I will leave this

Table I.
Results of factor analysis
(EFA, Varimax rotation)
for psychological
contract obligations

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8
<i>Stimulating job (12 items)</i>								
Complete and diverse work	0.61							
Challenging work	0.63							
Work that allows me to express myself	0.56							
Work that I feel connected to	0.53							
Work that gives me the opportunity to learn	0.71							
Opportunity to follow courses, workshops or training	0.70							
In-house education to expand my range of tasks	0.68							
More responsibility and tasks if I perform well at my current tasks	0.63							
Opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge for my current job	0.74							
Opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge for future jobs	0.71							
Coaching that supports my development	0.71							
An intellectually challenging job	0.49							
<i>Work atmosphere (7 items)</i>								
Nice working atmosphere and pleasant colleagues		0.65						
A work atmosphere that supports collaboration at work		0.63						
Support with problems		0.48						
Recognition for working hard		0.80						
Recognition for good performance		0.78						
Recognition for loyalty to the organization		0.75						
Timely information about changes in the organization		0.50						

(continued)

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8
<i>Autonomy (five items)</i>								
Freedom to give a personal touch to my work			0.59					
Opportunity to engage in decisions about execution of my tasks			0.58					
Opportunity to give my opinion about work affairs			0.61					
Opportunity to organize tasks according to my own best judgement			0.73					
Opportunity to take decisions about my work independently			0.70					
<i>Salary (five items)</i>								
A competitive salary				0.54				
An above average salary for this position				0.73				
Opportunities for promotion				0.48				
Performance-related pay				0.79				
Rewards for individual performance				0.75				
<i>Task description (four items)</i>								
A clear description of my tasks					0.75			
A clear instruction about what (not) to do in my job					0.82			
A clear instruction about how to do my job					0.83			
A clear description of what I should deliver in my job					0.56			
<i>Intra-organizational mobility (three items)</i>								
The opportunity to work for a different department						0.80		
The opportunity to get another job within this organization						0.79		
Support in finding other positions within this organization						0.76		

(continued)

Table I.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8
<i>Work-life balance (four items)</i>								
Flexible work hours							0.51	
Policies that support working parents							0.74	
The opportunity to change to a part-time contract if needed							0.76	
The opportunity to adapt my work schedule to family obligations							0.63	
<i>Job security (two items)</i>								
A contract that offers job security								0.64
If possible a permanent position								0.69
Eigenvalue	16.92	2.81	2.01	1.84	1.50	1.30	1.15	1.01
Cumulative percentage explained variance (%)	40	47 (+7)	52 (+5)	56 (+4)	60 (+4)	63 (+3)	66 (+3)	68 (+2)

organization as soon as I get better opportunities with another organization.” Turnover intention had a Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.79.

3.4 Analysis

The correlations among the variables under study are shown in Table II. To explore the differences among the three generations in the dimensions of their psychological contract and work outcomes (research questions 1, 2 and 3) we used multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test on a construct-level, controlling for gender and education. This analysis was followed by univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) for single dimensions. A conservative significance cut-off of $p < 0.01$ was used (Ng *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, post-hoc Bonferroni tests were used to get insight into which specific generation-groups significantly differ from each other in the dimensions of psychological contract and work outcomes. Bonferroni post-hoc tests were selected over other post-hoc tests for two reasons: firstly, the Bonferroni test does not require equal sample sizes (as is the case in this study of generations) and secondly it is considered a conservative test compared to other post-hoc tests, reducing the chance of type I errors (McClave and Sincich, 2003; Miller, 1981).

4. Results

The mean scores and correlations between the constructs can be found in Table II.

4.1 Do different generations value different aspects of their psychological contract?

Results for research question 1 can be found in Table III. Results showed significant differences among the three generations in the importance of dimensions of their psychological contract (Wilks’ $\Lambda = 0.81$, $F(16,650) = 4,419$, $p < 0.001$). Next, significant differences were found among the three generations for stimulating job ($F(2,332) = 6.86$, $p = 0.000$), job security ($F(2,332) = 10.64$, $p < 0.001$), intra-organizational mobility ($F(2,332) = 7.89$, $p < 0.000$), work-life balance ($F(2,332) = 5.45$, $p < 0.01$), and autonomy ($F(2,332) = 5.53$, $p < 0.01$). No significant differences were found among the three generations for work atmosphere, salary and task description. Results remained the same after controlling for gender and education level.

Results of a Bonferroni post-hoc test can be found in Table IV. Results show that Generation X and Generation Y perceive stimulating job as significantly more important than Baby boomers do ($p < 0.001$; $p < 0.01$). Generation X and Generation Y value Intra-organizational Mobility significantly higher than Baby boomers ($p < 0.001$; $p < 0.05$). For Generation X Work-life Balance is more important than for Baby boomers and Generation Y ($p < 0.001$; $p < 0.001$). Finally, to have autonomy ($p < 0.01$) as well as job security ($p < 0.001$) in your job is significantly more important for Generation X than it is for Generation Y.

4.2 Do younger generations show lower levels of commitment?

Results for research question 2 can be found in Table III. Results for both affective as well as continuance commitment showed significant overall differences (Wilks’ $\Lambda = 0.88$, $F(4,636) = 10.77$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, significant differences were found among the three generations for affective commitment ($F(2,322) = 16.22$, $p < 0.001$) and for continuance commitment ($F(2,322) = 11.82$, $p < 0.001$).

Results of a Bonferroni post-hoc test can be found in Table IV. Results indicate that Baby boomers ($p < 0.01$) and Generation X ($p < 0.001$) show significantly higher levels

Table II.
Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and correlations of study variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1 Generations	2.43	0.69														
2 Gender	1.59	0.49	0.20**													
3 Education	2.17	0.67	0.05	0.05												
4 PC stimulating job	4.24	0.60	0.08	0.15**	0.18**	0.93										
5 PC job security	4.30	0.79	-0.20**	0.09	-0.05	0.55**	0.80									
6 PC mobility	3.59	0.84	0.15**	0.08	0.06	0.49**	0.37**	0.82								
7 PC balance	3.85	0.73	-0.03	0.18**	0.02	0.43**	0.34**	0.39**	0.73							
8 PC atmosphere	4.33	0.61	-0.06	0.15**	0.10	0.68**	0.57**	0.31**	0.49**	0.92						
9 PC autonomy	4.24	0.60	-0.13*	0.10	0.19**	0.65**	0.54**	0.31**	0.47**	0.75**	0.88					
10 PC salary	3.87	0.78	-0.08	0.11*	0.07	0.58**	0.56**	0.31**	0.37**	0.61**	0.56**	0.85				
11 PC task description	4.04	0.67	-0.06	0.10	-0.01	0.46**	0.49**	0.26**	0.42**	0.62**	0.56**	0.47**	0.87			
12 Affective commitment	3.69	0.87	-0.26**	-0.05	0.21**	0.28**	0.25**	0.18**	-0.03	0.19**	0.27**	0.19**	0.13*	0.92		
13 Continuance commitment	2.99	0.89	-0.26**	-0.09	0.02	0.15**	0.26**	0.10	0.09	0.12*	0.17**	0.14**	0.14*	0.51**	0.76	
14 Turnover intention	2.95	0.94	0.14*	0.21**	0.14*	0.13*	0.09	0.18**	0.08	0.09	0.07	0.15**	0.07	-0.21**	0.28**	0.79

Notes: $n = 358$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; variables 4-14: five-point Likert scales 1 = totally disagree-5 = totally agree, values in italic along the diagonal are Cronbach's alphas for scaled variables; PC = psychological contract, BB = Baby Boomers (born 1945-1964), Gen X = Generation X (born 1965-1980), Gen Y = Generation Y (born 1981-1995)

PC dimension	F	Mean BB	SD	Mean Gen X	SD	Mean Gen Y	SD
Stimulating job	6.86**	3.90	0.53	4.37	0.52	4.23	0.64
Job security	10.64**	4.43	0.65	4.52	0.67	4.13	0.85
Intra-organizational mobility	7.89**	3.03	0.99	3.70	0.81	3.64	0.79
Work-life balance	5.45*	3.64	0.76	4.02	0.72	3.78	0.71
Work atmosphere	3.20	4.26	0.57	4.45	0.54	4.27	0.65
Autonomy	3.53*	4.26	0.54	4.38	0.58	4.15	0.61
Salary	3.16	3.84	0.68	4.02	0.79	3.79	0.79
Task description	3.02	3.98	0.55	4.16	0.66	3.97	0.69
Affective commitment	15.99**	3.93	0.93	3.99	0.73	3.46	0.88
Continuance commitment	9.24**	3.50	0.84	3.12	0.84	2.80	0.88
Turnover intention	4.52*	2.66	0.94	2.88	0.99	3.06	0.89

Notes: * $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.001$; df (between groups) = 2; df (within groups) = 339, PC = psychological contract, BB = Baby Boomers, Gen X = Generation X, Gen Y = Generation Y

Table III. Generational differences in psychological contract and work outcomes

Scale	Generations	Mean difference
<i>Psychological contract</i>		
Stimulating job	Gen Y > BB	0.33*
Stimulating job	Gen X > BB	0.48*
Job security	Gen X > Gen Y	0.38*
Intra-organizational mobility	Gen Y > BB	0.60*
Intra-organizational mobility	Gen X > BB	0.64*
Work-life balance	Gen X > BB	0.39*
Work-life balance	Gen X > Gen Y	0.23*
Autonomy	Gen X > Gen Y	0.23*
<i>Outcome variables</i>		
Affective commitment	BB > Gen Y	0.48*
Affective commitment	Gen X > Gen Y	0.54*
Continuance commitment	BB > Gen Y	0.71*
Continuance commitment	Gen X > Gen Y	0.31*
Turnover intention	Gen Y > BB	0.41*

Notes: * $p < 0.05$

Table IV. Bonferroni post-hoc analysis for generational differences in psychological contract and work outcomes

of affective commitment than Generation Y did. Both generations also show higher levels of continuance commitment than Generation Y ($p < 0.000$; $p < 0.01$). Results remain the same when controlled for gender. Post-hoc analysis for education shows that employees with a higher education level (Bachelor or Masters Level) felt more affective commitment to their organization than employees with a middle education level ($p < 0.01$) and more than employees with a low education level ($p < 0.001$).

4.3 Do younger generations show a higher turnover intention?

Results for research question 3 can be found in Table III. Results showed that the three generations of workers significantly differed in their level of turnover intention ($F(2, 318) = 4.520$, $p < 0.05$). Generation Y has a higher intention to leave their job than Generation X ($p < 0.05$) and Baby Boomers ($p < 0.05$) (see Table IV).

5. Conclusion and discussion

This study set out to explore generational differences in psychological contract and important work outcomes such as commitment and turnover intention. We proposed that Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y would have different expectations from their employers. Our results indicate that there are indeed generational differences in the psychological contract that employees hold with their organization. In line with current literature on generations, our results indicate that different generations hold different expectations and value different aspects in their job (e.g. Chen and Choi, 2008; Dries *et al.*, 2008; Eisner, 2005; Lancaster and Stillman, 2005; Smola and Sutton, 2002; Solnet and Hood, 2008). More specifically, we found that for Generation X work-life balance is more important than for the other two generations. Also, for Generation X autonomy in their jobs as well as job security are more important than for generation Y. Generation X and Generation Y perceive challenge and personal development (stimulating job) and intra-organizational mobility significantly as significantly more important than Baby Boomers do. These findings are in line with earlier findings about these generations (Davidson *et al.*, 2011; D'Annunzio-Green, 2008; Howe and Strauss, 2007; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Lancaster and Stillman, 2005; Tulgan, 2003).

Furthermore, we hypothesized that younger generations would have lower commitment to their organization as well as higher turnover intentions. Our results confirm these hypotheses. We found that Baby Boomers and Generation X had both stronger affective and continuance commitment to their organizations than Generation Y. Also, our results indicated higher turnover intentions for Generation Y than for Generation X. These results seem to confirm earlier findings by Twenge *et al.* (2010). These findings can be considered disconcerting for practitioners: at a time where demographically fewer younger workers become available, turnover as a result of unmet psychological contract obligations may be on the rise. Moreover, lowered commitment results in lower job performance (Jaros, 1997; McElroy, 2001; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). This poses a real threat quantitatively and qualitatively for the future survival of many hospitality businesses that rely on this part of the workforce (also see Solnet and Hood, 2008). Poulston (2008) claims that the prevalence of high staff turnover in the industry suggests serious management inadequacies. As younger generations are demonstrating lower commitment and higher turnover intention whilst their numbers in the workforce are on the rise, hospitality managers should act upon generational differences and the expectations that different generations may hold of their employers. We recommend that managers take a more generation-specific approach to managing their workforce (see also D'Annunzio-Green, 2008; Christensen Hughes and Rog, 2008) as well as innovating their human resources management to include more generation-specific practices (see also Davidson *et al.*, 2011; Poulston, 2008). Failing to do so will probably result in hospitality talent moving into other sectors of the labor market, intensifying the recruitment and retention challenge for hospitality companies (Barron, 2008).

5.1 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although this study makes a considerable contribution to the literature, it is important to note that our study had some limitations. Firstly, the data were collected at a single point in time for independent and outcome variables, and therefore we need to treat causal inferences with caution. Secondly, the data were collected in a single hotel chain.

Although hotels within this chain had considerable freedom to make their own executive decisions, and results are in line with an earlier study at another hotel chain (Lub *et al.*, 2009), further research is recommended to generalize to a larger hospitality population. In particular, we recommend including more SME type hospitality operators in future studies, as these form the bulk of the industry (Rijnders and Lub, 2011). Secondly, inferences to generational differences from cross-sectional data need to be interpreted with caution as age, time and cohort effects are confounded (Costa and McCrae, 1982; Schaie, 1965).

Thirdly, future studies would benefit from including a range of control variables, as individual differences within generations will obviously influence the results (Parry and Urwin, 2011). Though we found no major effects for education or gender, we recommend including these as control variables in future studies. There is a rich body of literature pointing out the relationship between skills mismatch (usually measured through education) and outcomes such as job satisfaction (Hersch, 1991; Tsang *et al.*, 1991), productivity (Marchante Mera *et al.*, 2010) and labor mobility (see, e.g. Hartog, 2000). Furthermore, future studies would benefit from including contract status as a control variable. The hospitality industry employs a large percentage of casual workers, and identifying differences between casual workers and full-time workers would provide a richer picture of the problem of turnover (Poulston, 2008).

Fourthly, in the current study we explored dimensions of the psychological contract, and in particular which psychological contract dimensions were important to Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. Future studies should also focus on the level of fulfillment or breach of these obligations. Fulfillment and breach of the psychological contract have been found to be stronger indicators of work outcomes (Bal *et al.*, 2008; Zhao *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, further (qualitative) exploration of psychological contract breach is likely to provide insights into reasons for high turnover rates in the hospitality industry.

5.2 Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. Although a growing body of literature points at the existence of generational differences in the general workforce (see, e.g. Ng *et al.*, 2010; Twenge and Campbell, 2008) and a number of authors called for more research on generational differences in the hospitality workforce (see, e.g. Barron, 2008; Davidson *et al.*, 2010; Solnet and Hood, 2008), very few studies have focused on generational differences in the hospitality industry to this point. Building on an extensive body of research on psychological contract and work outcomes in the general workforce, this study contributes by providing empirical evidence of generational differences in perceptions and attitudes of hospitality workers. Although more evidence of generational differences is becoming available, findings as well as topics of study are still varying widely. This suggests that further research is needed to get a better understanding of how, and if, generational differences impact different aspects of work.

Results from this study suggest that the concept of psychological contract provides an attractive avenue for better understanding how employees from different generations interact differently, or in some cases similarly, with their organizations. Further research is needed to find ways to realize higher commitment of especially the youngest generation of workers, and a lower turnover rate. In line with Solnet and

Hood (2008) and Davidson *et al.* (2011), we recommend that a hospitality research agenda for generational differences needs to be further developed.

5.3 Practical implications

In general, these findings support earlier work on generational differences and even lend some support to popular stereotypes about generations. Jobs that provide challenge and opportunities for development and career opportunities appear to be more important to both Generation X (born 1965-1980) and Generation Y (born 1981-1995). Also, Generation X was found to place higher value on work-life balance, autonomy and job security in comparison to their older and younger colleagues. No differences were found for work atmosphere, salary and task description. We also found significantly lower commitment and higher turnover intention for Generation Y in particular. Therefore, our findings suggest that the youngest generations tends to be less committed to their organization, and are more likely to leave if their needs are not fulfilled. As labor shortages increase as a result of demographical developments in the Western world, this would suggest that hospitality managers would have work even harder if they want to attract, retain and motivate their staff. We would suggest that both Generation X and Y will benefit from coaching management styles and HR policies that will help them develop and challenge themselves constantly. Also, it seems that Generation X warrants special attention from managers: they are more likely to stay and be committed to the organization, but also have needs that are broader in scope than Generation Y, and include issues such as work-life balance, job security and autonomy in their jobs. Finally, Baby Boomers, the smallest segment in the hospitality labor pool turn out to very committed, with lower leave intention. Although they did not value the different aspects of the psychological contract as highly as younger generations, they still have the same range of needs as younger generations and can still be motivated by acknowledging their job needs.

Our results imply that management should carefully and consistently monitor employee perceptions of psychological contract obligations and make them more explicit. By doing this, a better fit can be created between employees and the organization and the chance of psychological contract breach will be reduced. This will heighten commitment, reduce turnover intention and ultimately reduce turnover. As psychological contract and commitment are also related to performance (Jaros, 1997; McElroy, 2001; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001; Lub *et al.*, 2011; Zhao *et al.*, 2007), this will also affect the bottom-line revenue of the organization.

The differences between the three generations of hotel employees that were found in this study suggest that a more generation-conscious focus is required when attracting and retaining the workers. This may especially be true for the new generation considering their low commitment and high turnover intention.

Understanding and communicating with employees about their psychological contract will benefit the relationship and important organizational outcomes such as staff turnover or commitment. The hospitality industry is a people-intensive industry, and much could be gained by appreciating the expectations that different generations have of their employers. In particular, attention should be given to Generation Y (and Generation X), who form a large majority of the hospitality workforce and who, given the high turnover rates, seem to be voting with their feet when it comes to fulfillment of their psychological contract.

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