

Leading Across Generations: Leveraging the VABES Model for Effective Leadership

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Leading Across Generations: Leveraging the VABES Model for Effective Leadership

Senior Capstone Project

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the differences in behavior among three generations in the workplace: Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z. The research goes beyond observing visible behavior in the workplace. It explores unique values, assumptions, beliefs and expectations that are developed during the upbringing and in the environment these generations were born in. This approach allows more comprehensive insight of how generational differences manifest in the workplace, and provides valuable information to supervisors, managers and HR professionals to understand each individual and create a healthier working environment.

Keywords: Multigenerational companies, VABEs, Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z

INTRODUCTION

In today's workforce, the presence of multiple generations is changing the landscape of the hospitality industry. Each generation brings its own set of values, perspectives and experiences into the workplace. Their differences are influenced by the periods they were born. There were a lot of differences related to: job opportunities, upbringing, politics, and the overall access to information. Some older generations were experiencing wars and their main goal was to survive and seek safety. On the other hand, newer generations, who were born in the time of the Internet, are aware of many opportunities and want constant innovation. The diversity of backgrounds and experiences can be both a strength and a challenge for hospitality leaders.

In the dynamic environment of hospitality, an effective leader looks beyond the observation of the behavior of its employees. Leaders need to understand the underlying motives, values, and aspirations that support the behavioral differences between generations. Simply observing these differences in behavior is not enough. It will not change the dynamics of the environment. A leader must firstly understand the behavior in order to redesign its leadership style to make a more engaging and better environment.

The purpose of this project is to go below employees' surface and find out the differences and similarities among different generations. It seeks to find answers to following research questions:

1. What are significant behavior differences among generations in the hospitality industry?
2. Are employees aware of the generational differences present in the workplace?
3. Do individuals understand the differences in VABEs (values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations) among different generations?

Big Five Generations

According to Madeline Miles, a generation is a group of people born in the same period, sharing similar values, beliefs and attitudes from shared experiences (Miles,2022). The Traditionalist Generation was born between 1925 and 1945. The Baby Boomer Generation was born between 1946 and 1964 (Wing,2023). Generation X was born between 1965 and 1979. Generation Y or Millennials is the generation born between 1980 and 1994. The youngest generation, Generation Z, was born between 1995 and 2015 (Betz,2019).

According to Emily Wing, Hospitality Talent Advisor, today's workforce includes individuals from five generations. Traditionalists represent less than 1% of the hospitality workforce, and they are the oldest generation. The second one are Baby Boomers and they are approximately 22% of the hospitality workforce. Generation X represent approximately 35% of the hospitality workforce. Generation Y or Millennials are the largest workforce generation today, representing 35% of the hospitality workforce. Lastly the youngest generation, Generation Z, are just entering the labor market and are 7% of the total hospitality workforce. In order to increase your company's candidate, pool it is important to target different generations. For example, if you only use recruiting and retention strategies that are beneficial to Generation X, you will not appeal to 65% of the workforce.

Based on this information, there are three generations that are currently present in the labor market: Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z. There are significant differences between these generations.

Generational Dynamics in Hospitality

According to Mary Cooney, Generational Diversity Consultant, before we begin judging each generation, we need to understand that each generation grew up in a radically different time, which shapes how they see the world. Generational differences arise when more than one generation interacts with another. They are really clear in the workplace where individuals share ideas with each other. They are showing up in the way people think, behave, and act (Cooney,2021). Every generation brings their unique values and behavior to the workplace. Additionally, all of them want to feel respected, seen and heard in the workplace. Leaders can adjust their style by learning about the values and work patterns of the various generations (Miles,2022).

The diversity of employees is really important, especially for the hospitality industry, where employees must work together in order to provide a positive experience for guests. Generational diversity brings new perspectives to the workplace, which can result in better understanding of guests' needs. It can boost creativity, innovation and adaptation (Wing,2023). The labor market is getting older, which is resulting in many generations being present in the workplace (Zahirović,2022).

Leadership Is More Than a Position

According to Joff Hofman, bestselling author and motivational speaker, in order to lead, you must be able to connect, motivate and inspire others. Leadership is not about hierarchies and

titles. Being aware of your own thoughts and behaviors as well as how they affect people around you is essential to developing yourself as a leader (Hofman,2024).

James G. Clawson, a leadership consultant and writer, leadership is the ability of managing energy, firstly within yourself, and then in those around you. When you walk into the organization it is evident at which level of energy a company is performing. If the energy level of employees is low, we can connect that to the poor leadership. But on the other hand, if the level of energy in the organization is high, leadership is effective. He also argues that being a leader is not about the title or status, but the power to influence human behavior.

Leaders are not observers, they are the ones who are initiating action in order to make people perform on their highest potential (Clawson,2014).

Three Levels of Behavior

A leader is a person who can influence human behavior. When we talk about human behavior, we often think of the actions that can be captured by camera. But, there is a deeper side below the visible behavior, and in order to be a great leader, we must understand it.

According to Clawson, there are three levels of human behavior:

1. Level one (Visible behavior)
2. Level two (Conscious thought)
3. Level three (Values, assumptions, beliefs, and expectations -VABEs).

Level 1- Visible Behavior

At Level One, Clawson is referring to “Visible Behavior”. This simply refers to the things people say or do. This behavior can be captured by camera. This level completely ignores motivation behind the behavior which is what people think, believe and feel. This concept comes from early human society where authority was established through power and force. The approach is characterized by clear directives and immediate results. It was perceived as a fast, more simple and efficient way of influencing people. Managers did not care about the deeper part of their employees, the motivation of the behavior they can see in the workplace. The challenge arises when managers try to influence people at the First Level only, arguing how other two levels are too complex. For example, Henry Ford stated, "I keep trying to hire a pair of hands and they keep coming with heads and bodies attached!" in a frustrated manner. Level One Leadership techniques include giving orders, commands, and rewards, but they can be perceived as offensive and demeaning by employees. Leading at Level One is not allowing employees to reach full potential. If an employee is not fully engaged with his head, body and heart, the quality of work will be lower than if these two parts were involved. When describing this concept, the question is not if there will be a performance, but what is the quality of that performance(Clawson,2014).

If leaders want to develop a company that is performing at its full potential, they need to go beyond observing the behavior of employees only(Clawson,2014).

Level 2- Conscious Thought

At Level Two, Clawson is referring to “Conscious thought”. It refers to influencing how other people think. The main assumption is that the way people think affects their daily behavior. With this level we are diving one level deeper into the core of human behavior. This level is all about rational thinking, information processing, data gathering, setting goals, finding evidence, argumentation and persuasion. Level Two Leadership became popular in the time of Renaissance and then the Industrial Revolution. In that period, there was a rise of science, reasoning and explanation about certain phenomena. Before that, there was only one defined truth, and people knew what was acceptable, and what was not acceptable.

The main tools for level two leadership are logic and data, therefore we can conclude that if a Level One is about the body, Level Two Leadership is about the brain (Clawson,2014).

Level 3- Vabes (Values, Assumptions, Beliefs, Expectations)

The deepest level of a human being is connected to their values, assumptions, beliefs and expectations about how the world should be. The main goal of level three leadership is to influence people's hearts

Level three is connected to deep beliefs an individual has about what is right and wrong in life. It includes an individual list of priorities in life, what they value and how they perceive certain things. It is a summary of do's and don'ts. These parts of people cannot be seen as visible behavior, but it is something that influences visible behavior, and leaders must understand them if they want their employees to perform to their highest potential (Clawson, 2014).

Values

According to Shalom H. Schwartz, social psychologist and creator of the Theory of Basic Human Values, values are connected to core principles that shape our choices in life. They highlight the principles which are important to an individual. Each of those values hold a different level of importance for an individual (Schwartz,2012).

Evelyn Marinoff, psychology blogger, claims that values are the drivers of our personality and behavior. They are manifested in a way of how we make decisions, interact with others and operate in everyday life. Some of the values she mentioned were: achievement, fairness, curiosity, loyalty, status, meaningful work, recognition, respect, challenge, compassion and more (Marinoff,2023).

Schwartz Theory of Basic Values is a model that highlights ten broader dimensions of values that influence human behavior (Figure 1).

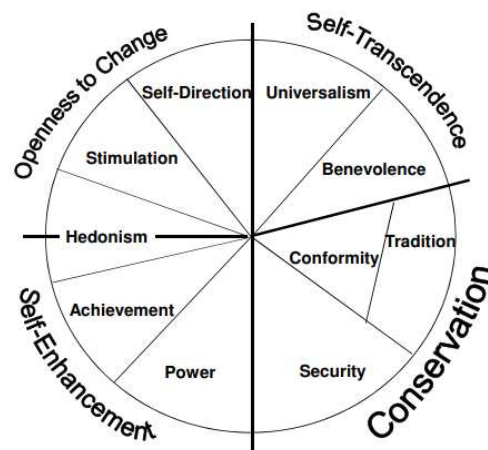


Figure 1. An Overview of the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values (Schwartz,2012).

The concept of Self Direction Values is all about the pursuit of independent thought and action. It is connected to characteristics such as: creativity, freedom, setting independent goals, curiosity and self-respect.

Stimulation Values are connected to excitement, innovation, the importance of taking risks and getting out of the comfort zone.

Hedonism Values are all about seeking joy, pleasure and happiness in each action. It is connected to a need to work for a deeper purpose.

Achievement values are connected to the importance of achieving personal goals and recognition.

Power values are connected to the importance of dominance, wealth, control and status. It can be viewed similarly as achievement values, but the difference is the need for authority and dominance that the person who values power is seeking. Achievement values are not directly connected to status.

Security Values refer to safety and stability in society, relationships and oneself. It includes ideals like living and working by policies, ensuring family security, sense of belonging and satisfying primary human needs.

Conformity Values are linked to actions that could potentially harm someone. These values come from the necessity to control possible disruptions that could lead to group functioning. They include kindness, politeness, loyalty, and responsibility.

Tradition Values refer to respecting other cultures, their beliefs, religion, language and way of life.

Benevolence Values are connected to the overall well-being of an individual. These values originate from a need for a better group functioning. It includes traits like being helpful and loyal. It includes love and forgiveness and open communication.

Universalism values refers to taking care about inner harmony, promoting equality, well-being, environmental protection and overall striving for making an impact in the world.

The theory of Basic Values explains the dynamics between each ten of them. Individuals having one set of these values, will probably clash with another set of values (Schwartz,2012). For example, if an individual has a set of security values. They are aiming for a secure job where they are aware of their everyday tasks, they have a safe salary coming each month, they will probably not align in a company where there is a constant innovation and risk taking needed.

Beliefs

Dr. Nita Matthews-Morgan's research suggests that belief fundamentally shapes how individuals perceive themselves and the world around them. Beliefs are shaped during our childhood the most, but also through many life experiences and interactions with others. The strongest beliefs are formed during childhood, when the mind was open to interpretations of other people in the environment. In those early years, individuals cannot decide which beliefs will serve them later in life, therefore they are open to receive any. They are part of the subconscious, therefore they are one of the leading aspects of making decisions in life.

Dr. Matthews-Morgan provided an example of her beliefs that were influenced by her parents. Her mother and father lived in the time of the Great Depression, and during those times their only goal was to survive. Her parents were making decisions in the survival mode, therefore her beliefs were shaped accordingly. During her life, she noticed that she was operating in survival mode, scared of risks. After some time, she became aware that she formed a belief how there is never going to be enough money for her. Those beliefs were making her feel anxious, and that was reflecting her behavior (Matthews-Morgan, 2017).

Ruth Dunn, leadership coach and trainer shared how beliefs influence her behavior when starting her own business. She explains how whenever she wanted to expose herself for new experiences, she would hear her inner voice telling her that she will mess up, people will think she is not good enough, and that led her to thinking that she is really not good enough to start something new. After researching, she came to the conclusion that this belief that she is not good enough goes back to experience when she was 6 years old, having her solo performance and getting a stage

fright in front of everyone. She was ashamed of herself, and each time she would do something herself she felt like she was going to mess it up (Dunn, 2020).

Dr. Matthews Morgan highlighted some of the beliefs people could have about the world based on the previous experiences they had. For example, if an individual experienced betrayal, some of their beliefs could be that people can't be trusted. The question is how is that person going to behave in the workplace. Even if other coworkers have a good relationship with their manager, that one individual who has a belief that people can't be trusted, will have a hard time trusting. This type of behavior can impact the performance of an individual in the workplace (Matthews-Morgan, 2017).

Assumptions

According to Daniel Kies, an assumption is a belief or feeling regarding the truth of something or the likelihood of something happening, even without concrete evidence. He provided an everyday example of traffic at the intersection. Drivers on a highway can make an assumption about other drivers' behavior based on their beliefs about what is an ethical behavior in traffic or previous experience in traffic. He provided an example of a person that sees a green light at an intersection, assuming that drivers who are on the other side of the road follow their red light and stop. This assumption allows the driver that sees a green light to continue driving without thinking about another driver stopping at the red light. Kies argues that while these assumptions are usually correct, there is always a chance that they might be wrong. Driver that noticed the red

light might be in a hurry and assume that the other driver will be more careful, and he might go through the red light (Kies, 2022).

Andrea Johnson, transformational leadership coach, gave an example of assumptions that are the most common in the workplace. Assumptions that supervisors and managers know better than the employees below them. In her coaching sessions, she discussed this shared assumption with a manager of a company that was her client. She expressed frustration over her team's lack of critical thinking skills when it comes to coming up with solutions. After having a conversation with them, she came to the conclusion that they have a deep belief that people who are above them in the organizational structure are more important, therefore they assumed they knew better (Johnson,2023).

According to Olga Gjerald and Torvald Øgaard, employees in the hospitality industry develop assumptions about their workplace based on the interactions with their colleagues and guests. They argue how assumptions come from our core beliefs that we developed through our life. Assumptions and beliefs are tied together and they influence the decision making process of an individual. They argue that assumptions directly influence behavior. The example provided in their research paper was that if an employee assumes they are invaluable and easily replaceable, this can directly influence the quality of service they provide to the guests.

Additionally, the employee assumption about their coworker can also contribute to their overall relationship in the company (Gjerald ,Øgaard,2010).

Expectations

Moshe Ratson, a psychotherapist defines expectations as a strong idea whether something will happen or if it's true. It is a personal hope of how people will react and how the world should be. They are a natural part of human experience, and each day we have expectations from something or someone (Ratson,2023).

According to Visweswaran Balasubramanian, expectations come from genetic predispositions, cognitive functions, attitude development, social influences, personal beliefs and cultural standards. Individuals have expectations because they naturally connect their aspirations and hope with happiness. People have a need for personal growth. With each completed personal or organizational milestone, there are additional expectations. (Balasubramanian,2022).

A common sign that an individual has an expectation is: when expecting a specific result, envisioning how the event is going to play out and holding a specific desire of what you need or how you would like to feel. Because expectations are really tied to our beliefs, values and emotions, we tend to get attached to them. This is why it is really challenging when expectations are not met. It leads people feeling frustrated and disappointed (Scott,2022).

According to Matt Dogson, there are four segments of employee expectations in the workplace. The first one is expectations about benefits like: salary, pensions, bonuses, healthcare etc. The second expectation that employees have is a harmony between work and personal life, or in other words work-life balance. If an employee is happy outside of work, they will be even happier when working in the organization. Time that they spend working on their personal hobbies,

spending time with family and friends can significantly increase the productivity of an employee. This also includes offering flexible working hours. This can include working in a certain hour that are adaptable for an employee, or giving the opportunity to work from home on certain days. This heavily depends on the industry an individual is working in, but it is surely one of the newest expectations in the workplace. Organizational culture which includes following organizations mission, vision and values. Constant recognition that can be done in meetings, through monthly rewards, events etc. Good leadership style that motivates employees, rather than punishing them when doing something wrong. Training is also part of the successful organizational culture. If an employee sees that manager is investing in their skill and knowledge development, there will be a sense of respect between them. This is a benefit for both employees and employers. The fourth segment is a healthy working environment. Employees aspire to have a good team working with them. They want to feel collaboration, respect and a friendly atmosphere. They have expectations that there will be no nepotism involved in the process of promotion. They expect that the promoted employee will be one with adequate skills and knowledge for a certain position. (Dogson,2019).

Vabes Trough Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z

VABEs is the deepest part of an individual. It starts with deep beliefs we have about how the world should be. Then it is connected with values, and the list of the things that are important to an individual. Based on these beliefs and values, people are developing assumptions and expectations (Clawson, 2014).

According to Dr. Nita Matthews-Morgan's research, the core of who we are, our beliefs, are developed mostly during our childhood. There is a high influence of the culture and environment of an individual. This shapes their beliefs about how a world should be, and it influences how they behave with their family members, partner, friends and colleagues at work (Matthews-Morgan, 2017).

Different behavior results in different generations living in a different period of time, shaping their values and beliefs in different ways. Upbringing is a big factor of shaping behavior of an individual, but another big factor is the politics, culture and environment. If someone was born in the time of poverty and wars, the beliefs, values and behavior will likely differ from someone born in the time of the Internet and unlimited opportunities (Zahirović,2022).

Generation X

Generation X was born between 1965 and 1979 (Betz,2019). They were raised in the time of significant social, economic and technological changes. Unlike the previous generation (Baby Boomers), they mostly come from a two-income family. There was an increase in the number of women joining the workforce, therefore they were not only parents involved in the upbringing, but also neighbors, friends and school. They were growing up in the time of technological and economical changes, where the manufacturing industry was slowly turning to service industries. Additionally, Generation X was more educated than the previous generation. They had more interactions with other cultures, which made them respect diversity more (Harber,2011).

Generation X is considered to be a transitional generation, because they are in the middle of Baby Boomers who were valuing tradition, and new generations of technology. Due to their parent's work-centric lifestyles, which they observed had a negative impact on their health and behavior, Gen X were the first ones who were researching the concept of Well-being.

During their early years, there was a significant increase in divorce rates, due to economic and social changes. They got used to the high responsibility in their early ages and were at home living alone, some even taking care of their siblings. This impacted their need for self-reliance and developing creative thinking skills.

Because they were raised by either workaholic or divorced parents, their main values are connected to their family. The economic situation they went through, was one of the key drivers of belief that earning money is hard and that they would need a lot of years invested in order to have a career where they can earn enough money to raise their children. However, they still don't want to be workaholic as their parents, and not have time for themselves. They are aware that money is a sense of freedom that they can spend in their free time with their family and friends (Berkup,2014).

Economic and social changes developed their decision making by practicality. They recognized the significance of being resourceful and practical. This can be evident in their decision making towards their finances, career and lifestyle decisions. They favor strategic planning and realistic expectations, rather than idealistic expectations. This can be seen in their consumer behavior, when purchasing, they often seek for the price, rather than value, or even a marketing trend.

Skepticism plays an important role in how Generation X sees the world. They tend to have assumptions that are based on the belief that promises are not real. These could be either from politicians, managers, brands etc. Additionally, they require evidence and good arguments in order to earn their trust and loyalty. All of these characteristics are connected to them being self-reliant and seeking security, due to the dynamic times they were born in (Media Culture,2023).

These characteristics contribute to their behavior in the workplace. Generation X tends to be resilient, adaptable, self-reliant and flexible. The times in which they were born, made them feel independent, analytical and hardworking. Because they were living in a hardworking household, they developed a belief that they don't need to be loud about their achievements in life. They enjoy being recognized, but they act like they don't need it. Their childhood taught them that to focus on things they can change, developing a pragmatic view at any challenges they have. This is why these generations have strong problem solving skills. They are seen as the first technological native generation. They are tech- savvy, but not tech-dependent like newer generations. They respect hierarchy, but they don't like the idea of being micromanaged. This goes back to the increased independence they are used to having. This reflects on the team work, because they prefer doing things by themselves, even though they like the idea of being a part of a big team.

In the workplace, they value work-life balance. Even though they have a strong work ethic, they have a desire for spending time with their family and friends. They value time with their family, due to the minimal parent involvement in their childhood. They have a desire to have a

successful career in order to provide for their family. As a generation, they have seen a lot of change, this is why they seek security in the workplace. They focus more on financial security the job is providing them, rather than choosing fulfillment. They want a clear separation between their personal hobbies and work. This is connected to the belief that you cannot live out of the things you like to do in your free time. They value face to face communication and aspire to build long lasting relationships (Anke,2023).

Generation Y (Millennials)

Generation Y, also known as Millennials, were born between 1980 and 1994 (Betz,2019). They were born and raised in the times of the high technological advancements, different communication channels, in the over-planned world, where everyone is busy doing something. They were affected by globalization where the international trade of goods, services, and information was highly increased. From an early age, they are surrounded by information and communication technology. Because they were raised in the time with fewer barriers than their parents, they proved a growing interest in different cultures, language learning and international companies.

Generation Y shows more interest in team work than Gen X. They also don't like being micromanaged, but they enjoy working in a healthy environment with their colleagues. They believe in the strength of unity (Berkup,2014).

They are the leading generation in today's workforce. They value work-life balance, meaning that they would exchange a good salary for a shorter working day, or flexible working hours.

This is why there is a job hopping trend with this generation. They are constantly trying to find an organizational fit, where they can learn, grow and have flexibility. Additionally, they have multiple hobbies that they are making as their side job. They value a positive working environment and a sense of purpose, which is also one of the factors that influences job hopping trends. They value openness and communication. As opposed to Gen X, they don't really value hierarchy. Because of the availability of new information, they are aware of the difference between leaders and managers. They aspire to have a leader who will not micromanage them, but be there and provide feedback when needed. They value leaders who are dedicated to their employees to the point that it is not recognizable who the leader really is. A collaborative leader, who is open to communication and welcomes new ideas is the one they will respect.

Fast economic growth and technological development, made them adaptable. They are more educated than the previous generation, and are taking advantage of the availability of the information provided on the Internet (Wing,2023).

Because they had to navigate real life and the technological aspects, this generation is good at multitasking. They rather prefer doing jobs that are not related to only one task. They enjoy different types of responsibility that can fit in their working hours. Companies that are aligned with their vision and mission are the ones who are attractive to this generation. They enjoy feeling fulfilled in their workplace and making a change. They aspire to live by the purpose and be active in fulfilling the company's purpose. Competitiveness is important to them in the business world. They enjoy taking initiatives and being innovative. This is why in the workplace, they value training and development programs. It gives them a sense that the management is

thinking about their personal development and getting them ready to take on the world in front of them. Diversity is attractive to them, since they are more connected than previous generations, they like the idea of working in multinational teams. The idea of a career for them is related with a job and with personal development. They don't put their personal development and their job in different boxes, but as a path of personal growth. This is why freedom for them is not only money, but being fulfilled while pursuing their purpose (Berkup,2014).

Generation Y seeks mentorship and coaching. They are self-critical and are aiming to be better in each segment of their life. Whether it is a simple training program imposed from the company, or a coach for personal development, they are interested in it. Continuous growth is important to them, and this is why they always seek different opportunities. Transparency is also important, they require constant communication between management and the team, not only for the tasks, but the general situation of the company. They seek trust and don't need much arguments to make them trust you. But if the trust is lost one time, they will take it personally (Fuscalado,2023).

Unlike Generation X, Millennials prefer direct recognition in the workplace. They value recognition on a personal level. Companies should focus more on intrinsic types of motivation when it comes to Gen X. They feel good about themselves when given autonomy, more opportunities for personal development and a work life balance. They highly value personalized approach when it comes to recognition. This implies knowing them on a more personal level, like their hobbies, favorite food, and the things they value the most. They also prefer spontaneous recognition through check-ins, feedback, recognition in a meeting etc. The

recognition and feedback from their team members is also important for Gen X, because they strive for a sense of belonging and strong relationships in the workplace (Kreitner,2023).

Generation Z

Generation Z was born between 1995 and 2015 (Betz,2019). They were raised in a highly interconnected world, where technology, specifically the Internet, was a part of their everyday lives from their teenage years. They were raised by Generation X or Millennial parents, but also by social media content creators. This made this generation more open to changing their beliefs and perspectives on how the world should be (Dorina,2021).

Generation Z have been raised with smartphones and access to the Internet from an early age, and this shaped their beliefs in a sense that they can find information they want at any time. This access to the Internet, and learning from content creators, made them independent. They are aware that they can get to an information source in minutes and learn something new faster than older generations. Since they were spending a lot of time playing video games with gamers that are living in other countries, they became aware of the cultural differences, early in their life. The presence of different cultures on social media, makes them more open to cultural differences (Chillakuri,2020).

This generation is tech savvy and they expect technology in the workplace. They believe that repetitive tasks should be automated, and that employees should work on more meaningful goals. They are often drawn to companies focused on diversity and sustainability. They value

mentorship programs, self-development, coaching's and chances to take on new responsibilities (Wing,2023).

Dr. Bharat Chillakuri did research with Generation Z on their values and expectations in the workplace. He collected students from three different educational institutions, who are finishing master programs in business. They were doing interviews with students who had working experience or the ones who completed internships. After the interviews they came up with a list of expectations that were most important to these students: Meaningful work, Performance management, Work-life balance, Personal connect, Bigger picture at work and Learning and development.

One of the participants highlighted how they are aware that if they enter a new job, they might be assigned with tasks of a lesser importance. Nonetheless, they expressed enthusiasm for exploring new opportunities and developing their skills on more meaningful tasks. He believes that repetitive tasks should be automative.

Generation Z wants to have a clear understanding of companies values, vision, mission and strategic goals. This generation chooses organization not by their products and services, but by the values and ethics that stand for. Another participant commented that their motivation is driven by clearly explained tasks, meaning that there needs to be a reason why they are doing it. He says how he values the impact he will make in the company.

Performance management is also really important for this generation. They value an instant, frequent and face to face type of feedback. One of the participants said how they want to contribute to the organization, therefore they need their managers to appreciate them when they do something that is right, but also to direct them and give them candid feedback when something is wrong.

Generation Z likes the idea of knowing where they are, and where they can be in the terms of their goals, this is why frequent feedback and discussions are something they value the most in the organization. They are eager to grow, hungry for learning new things and developing themselves as a person through their meaningful work. They often feel ready for promotion after a few months, because they are giving themselves emotionally.

They value work-life balance. Many of them argued how flexibility and work-life balance are one of the most important things for them in the organization. One of the participants said how it is important to divide personal life and job responsibilities, meaning that the moment the shift is over, it is not ethical from the management to require more tasks. Many of them prefer hybrid or remote working models in order to have more time for themselves, family and friends.

Personal connect is also something that is meaningful for Generation Z. They want to work in an environment where they feel comfortable sharing their opinion, communicating and being themselves. They believe that strong relationships with their colleagues, managers and leaders is one of the key aspects of career advancement.

Generation Z is one of the most ambitious generations, and they value fulfillment. This is why they want to understand the bigger picture of each project. They aim to make a change not only in the workplace, but for the community as well.

Continuous learning and development is something that will retain Generation Z as employees. One of the participants argues how they would feel respected if the company invested in their knowledge and skill development. They value training and frequent feedback from their leaders (Chillakuri, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Conducting a focus group, allows participants to feel more comfortable sharing their views on a particular topic. It allows researchers to have a more in depth understanding of participant's beliefs, emotions and perspectives. As opposed to the interview process, the researcher can go deeper and ask more sub-questions to understand what the participant wants to say and how they feel about the topic. A focus group creates an environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, leading to richer conversations filled with important information (Purple Griffon, 2023).

Asking open-ended questions allows the researcher to get more than what is in the question outline. Understanding feelings and not just the topic is something that is one of the biggest advantages of asking open-ended questions. Such questions bring topics to life, with authentic

answers from different people. Not only that a researcher will get more personal answers, but there would be an opportunity to observe participants body language (Martin,2023).

Purpose

The goal of this research is to find the differences between values, beliefs, assumptions and beliefs of Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z. The purpose of writing this research is to provide an overview of generational VABEs to managers, supervisors, HR department and other stakeholders in order to gain knowledge about the needs of their employees and maximize the value they can provide to the company. Understanding employees on a more personal level could be the key to unlocking their potential and performance in the company.

Participants

Data was collected from a total of 12 participants through live focus group discussions.

Participants were divided into three generations: Gen X (1965 -1979), Gen Y (1980 -1994) and Gen Z (1995 - 2015). Each focus group had four participants, with an equal number of women and men.

For the sampling method, a convenience sample method was used to recruit participants for this study. Participants were reached through email and LinkedIn. They were chosen by their educational and working experiences in the hospitality industry in Croatia. This method was used because of the practicality in reaching individuals within the same demographic group.

Focus group discussions were recorded for the purpose of analyzing and organizing information more accurately. Participants were assured that their identity will remain anonymous, and this commitment of anonymity was communicated before the focus group discussion started.

TABLE 1 Profile and number of participants

Participants						
Individuals with Hospitality Industry Backgrounds						
Demographics	Gen X		Gen Y		Gen Z	
Age range	(1965 -1979)		(1980 -1994)		(1995 - 2015)	
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Number of participants	2	2	2	2	2	2

Model

Model that was used for this research was VABEs model by James G Clawson. Model outlines three levels of behavior: Visible Behavior, Conscious thought and VABEs. The third level of behavior is the core of an individual and it directly affects visible behavior. Third level of behavior describes individual values, assumptions, beliefs and expectations. These components of a human behavior are developed through culture, upbringing and the environment they are in. It directly affects how a person behaves in everyday life (Clawson, 2014).

Procedure

Before writing a final outline of questions, a pilot focus group was conducted with Generation Z in order to determine the flow and quality of questions. During the pilot focus group, it was evident that participants were losing focus after 45 minutes, so we lowered the number of open ended questions from 13 to 10. The questions we removed from a final outline were connected to

participants sharing their experiences when working with each generation. The solution we imposed was to encourage participants to share their experiences when they discuss a certain topic that was one of the 10 in the outline.

Focus group discussion was conducted live. Duration of the discussion was 45 minutes per group. Before the discussion group started, reservations of focus group locations were made. Participants had the opportunity to choose the location. The main idea was to have discussion in one of the hotel lobby bars in order for the participants to feel comfortable and be able to have a circular seating arrangement. Two focus groups were done in the hotel lobby bar, and the third one was done in the hotel meeting room.

The outline of questions was present in the focus group discussion, but the emphasis was also on allowing participants to create their own sub questions in order to achieve richer conversation. The focus was on participants, and the goal was for the moderator to speak as little as possible in order to not influence the flow of information. Additionally, there was an observation of who would be the “opinion maker” in the group, and when determining them, they were the ones who were answering the questions last, in order to not interrupt and influence the information coming from other participants.

After each question, the moderator was the one repeating and summarizing the answers of the participants, to make sure that information was understood. In addition to recording, there was one note taker present in order to have accurate information.

Most common keywords in the discussion were: personal values, expectations, beliefs, assumptions and leadership. At the end of the discussion, each group agreed on five most important values for their generation.

RESULTS

The results from focus group discussions are analyzed and coded in Table 2. Participants' answers are segmented into some of the key focus group discussion topics such as: Personal Values, Personal Success, Flexibility and Perception of Generational Differences. Responses indicating agreement with the discussed topics are assigned the code '1', while those indicating disagreement are assigned the code '0'.

TABLE 2 Segmented Responses by Discussion Topics

YES	NO				
1	0				
Focus Group Data					
PERSONAL VALUES		GEN Z	GEN Y	GEN X	TOTAL
If my values don't align with the company's, I may consider finding a different job.		1	1	0	66%
Each generation has unique values shaped by their upbringing and the world they grew up in.		1	1	1	100%
PERSONAL SUCESS		GEN Z	GEN Y	GEN X	TOTAL
I keep my professional and personal interests separate; they're distinct and shouldn't overlap.		0	0	1	33%
I consider having a secure job and steady income as indicators of career success.		0	0	1	33%
I view authenticity and aligning with one's purpose as signs of career success.		1	1	0	66%
I prefer automating repetitive tasks in the workplace.		1	1	0	66%
Work entails routine and occasional entertainment aspects.		0	0	1	33%
FLEXIBILITY		GEN Z	GEN Y	GEN X	TOTAL
I prefer remote work model.		0	0	0	0%
I prefer hybrid work model.		1	1	0	66%
I prefer onsite work model.		0	0	1	33%
I am comfortable with colleagues and supervisors contacting me outside my working hours.		0	1	1	66%
PERCEPTION OF GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES		GEN Z	GEN Y	GEN X	TOTAL
I notice generational differences in the company I work in.		1	1	1	100%
I am familiar with the values and expectations of my coworkers across different generations.		0	0	0	0%

PERSONAL VALUES

Alignment with Values

Out of three generations, Gen X stated that they would not change the company they are working for, because their personal values don't align with the company's values.

Generational Values

All three generations agreed that each generation holds a unique set of values, and they are influenced by the upbringing and environment the generation is born in.

PERSONAL SUCCESS

Balancing Passion and Profession

Out of three generations, Generation Z and Generation Y agreed that the work they are doing needs to be connected with their personal interests. They connect their job with pursuing what they are passionate about. Third generation divides jobs with personal interests.

Security as a career success indicator

Out of three generations, Generation X believes that job security and stable income is one of the main career success indicators.

Finding a purpose as a career success indicator

Out of three generations, Generation Z and Generation Y agreed that being driven by your life purpose is one of the main career success indicators.

Repetitive Tasks Automation

Out of three generations, Generation Z and Generation Y stated that they want repetitive tasks to be automated in the workplace in order to increase efficiency and focus on increasing creativity and personal touch depending on the industry.

FLEXIBILITY

Remote Work Model

All three generations agreed that they don't want to have a job where they need to work 100% remotely. All of them need to have personal connections with their coworkers.

Hybrid Work Model

Out of three generations, Generation Z and Generation Y agreed that hybrid work, part of the site, but still flexible to work from home, is the model they would appreciate in their desired job.

Onsite Work Model

One out of three generations agreed that they would prefer working only on site without needing any additional equipment that will allow them to work from home.

Off-Hours Contact Comfort

Out of three generations, Generation Z doesn't prefer for their colleagues, supervisors and managers to contact them after their working hours or holidays.

PERCEPTION OF GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

Workplace Generational Differences

All three generations agreed that they noticed behavioral differences among different generations in the workplace.

Understanding Multigenerational Co Worker Values and Expectations

None of the three generations understand the values and expectations of their coworkers that are behind the behavioral differences among generations.

DISCUSSION

The results suggest that employees and managers are noticing differences in the behavior of different generations in the workplace. However, they are not aware of the differences in values, assumptions, beliefs and expectations of each individual. These results are consistent with the claim of James G. Clawson, which states how most of the individuals are focused on visible behavior only. The level which focuses only on the things people say and do, and completely ignores the question why they are doing it, and what is below the surface (Clawson,2014).

Generational Common Values

During each focus group discussion, participants were asked to come up with five values that are important to their generation. Generation Z agreed on these five values: Personal Growth, Meaningful Work, Innovation, Flexibility and Creativity. These values reflect the research done

by Dr. Bharat Chillakuri, where the common values of this generation were connected to meaningful work and creativity (Chillakuri, 2020). Generation Y or Millennials, agreed on the following values: Work-life balance, Health, Team Work, Open Mindedness and Loyalty. This analysis supports the theory of Emily Wing that describes this generation as the one who is all about a healthy environment and working in teams, being open to new opportunities (Wing 2023). Generation X agreed on these values as the most important for them: Autonomy, Organization, Communication, Security and Team Work. Even though security plays a big role for this generation, all of them emphasized that teamwork has a greater value in their eyes as opposed to money. They would rather have a healthy working environment, than a higher salary. As the research done by Berkup suggests, Gen X was raised in the dual income family and they got used to being responsible at an early age. This developed the need for autonomy and organization and for security, because they were living in uncertain times (Berkup,2014).

Admirable Qualities Reflect Self

The first question during the focus group discussion was for the participants to identify an individual whom they admire. To define values this individual follows and to identify what is this person doing that they admire so much. According to Benjamin Hammersley, the things we see in other people, their values and how they live their life, is exactly who we are or what we would like to be like (Hammersley,2016).

In Generation X, two out of four participants highlighted how their mother is the person they admire the most. The traits both of the participants agreed on were high responsibility, selflessness, persistence and her ability to multitask. Both of them were female. The other two

participants, highlighted their managers that were encouraging them to be disciplined and persistent, but to also be smart enough to take time for themselves, and not run for money only. They highlighted how they were not listening to that individual before, but now after they worked hard throughout the years, they see the value in that advice and person. These two participants were males.

Generation Y had multiple answers to this question. They were referring to famous people like: Dražen Petrović, Elon Musk, Bonnie Christine and Bruce Wayne. They all had connected answers and agreed with each other about the values of the people they admire. They highlighted that it is easy to act perfect in today's world, and how they value the opposite: people who are vulnerable, who don't have problem sharing how they really feel, and people who are not perfect because this is what is relatable to them. They value authenticity. In other words, individuals whose words, thoughts and actions are connected. People that live their truth and their work is connected with what makes them unique. They referred to a friend who was the first in their environment who did not worry about money, turned to personalization and tried to awaken emotion in people through her work. They also mentioned that they like to see people who have hobbies and are dedicated to them and turn them into a quality business. They emphasized that authenticity is the only true path to a happy life. They emphasized that in their families, relationships often suffered because of too much work, and they admire people who know how to organize that work and dedicate themselves to relationships.

Generation Z also had multiple answers, and all of them were agreeing with each other when it comes to core values of the individuals they admire. Some of the individuals they were

mentioning were: Jesus, family members and managers. All of them were referring to a definition of a leader for them. They believe how a lot of people are scared of their managers, and they value the ones who can lead with patience, empathy and motivation to achieve the company's goals. They value leaders who are down to Earth and ready to hear new creative ideas. All of them were mentioning continuous improvement. Three of the participants highlighted how they value people who are 100% involved in their work, and are following their passion, giving back to the community and their parents. Additionally, they value people who are continuously investing in their personal development, either through courses, coaching's, books or podcasts. They believe that today people have the privilege to learn from multiple sources, and they value those who are using materials in order to leave an impact. They value individuals who are transparent and know how they want to feel around their friends, family and in the workplace. They value the ones who have the courage to leave their comfort zone, and go toward their highest potential. One of the participants mentioned a manager that said how the work they are doing almost doesn't feel like a job, because they enjoyed it so much. After hearing that sentence, all of the participants agreed that this is how they would like to feel. They are aware of the hard work and authenticity needed to get to that point, but they believe it is worth it.

After- Working Hours Communication

Generation Z highlighted how they don't have any problems with staying overtime in the workplace, but they don't like the idea of that situation being frequent. All four of them had experience in the hospitality industry, and staying overtime for a few hours was something that was expected of them. They believe that it is disrespectful to ask employees to stay overtime

frequently, and this happens due to the shortage of employees. On the other hand, Generation X stated that it frustrates them how Gen Z has high expectations out of the workplace especially in the hospitality industry. They believe that they are used to entertainment such as Social Media Content, and they expect their job to be as exciting as being on their phones. They believe that a lot of them are unreliable and that is due to a lot of dopamine available around them. Participants of the Generation Y, stated how they feel bad calling Gen Z employees on the phone or asking them to stay overtime, because they are aware that they don't like it. Even though they understand that Gen Z is more respectful of their free time, they still believe that this trait is not that good in the long run.

Job as a reflection of personal interests

When asked if they would like for their job to be a reflection of their personal hobbies, or they divide their personal interests and job, the findings were surprising. Three out of four participants in Generation X stated that they prefer their personal interests being divided from their actual job. One of the participants stated that her present job is reflecting one of her interests. During the discussion about this topic, most of them agreed that a lot of younger generations expect their job to be full of excitement, without repetitive tasks, and they don't see it that way. They believe that a job has some entertainment components like colleagues, good feedback and overall atmosphere, but they don't have high expectations of needing to work on something different each day. They believe that after the job is done, this is the time for excitement and entertainment. This is when they focus on their personal interests, often connected to hanging out with friends and family, dining in restaurants and traveling.

Generation Y and Generation Z agreed that their desired job is a reflection of their personal interests. Generation Y believes that being authentic in life, means also working a job that is a reflection of your true self. All four of them agreed that there are many opportunities today, and a lot of people are building their business, and succeeding by being their true selves.

Generation Z highlighted that they are still in the learning process, searching for what exactly is their passion in life, and currently are working jobs that are interesting to them, but not completely fulfilling. They highlighted that fulfillment is really important to them, and they can achieve it only if their work is their passion. During the focus group discussion, they stated how they believe that identifying and understanding that something is not right for them, is a good path to discovering their purpose.

Flexibility in the Workplace

When talking about flexibility, Generation X values their free time, and aspires to have 1-2 free days per week, while having the standard working hours. They don't like the idea of working from home remotely, nor hybrid. They prefer having face to face communication with their colleagues and working only on site. They believe that working on site is more efficient, and the hospitality industry in which they are planning to stay, requires them to work on site only.

Generation Y also doesn't like the idea of working fully remotely. However, they like the idea of a hybrid work model. They believe that certain industries allow this model more frequently, but

since they are working in the hospitality industry it can be challenging, but still manageable.

Two out of four participants already work hybrid, and their job position does not require them to be on the site all the time. The other two participants work on site, but are actively thinking about how to change to a hybrid model in order to have more time for themselves, family and friends.

It is important to know that these two participants are entrepreneurs and have been in the restaurant business for 10 years, and they can allow themselves to be divided from their employees.

During the focus group discussion Generation Z agreed that the remote working model is not really attractive to them. Even though they value flexibility, they also value personal connections and the most attractive model for them is hybrid working model. A lot of them don't see themselves working in the hospitality industry only, and they believe there is a way of working hybrid for them. According to Chillakuri, most of the Gen Z would prefer working remotely(Chillakuri,2020). But as seen from this discussion, these participants don't find remote work really attractive. The limitation for this difference could be cultural differences, since most of the information from secondary research came from Western countries.

Feedback Importance

In the focus group discussion, the conclusion was that all three generations value feedback and in person meetings. Generation Y and Generation Z believe that certain meetings that are not out of big significance, could be done online as well in order to be more efficient. Generation X was only interested in meetings in person.

When talking about the location of meetings, Generation X prefers regular meetings in meeting rooms or in formal settings in order to achieve professionalism and efficiency.

Generation Y and Generation Z didn't have any preferences. They can do it either in the meeting rooms, or in more relaxed settings like cafe bar, nature, hotel lobby bar... They stated how it is really important with whom a meeting is, but when it comes to atmosphere, they prefer to feel comfortable. Atmosphere that is created in the meeting is of a greater importance than the location.

When it comes to feedback, during the discussion, Generation X pointed out that feedback is important for them. It is important for them to receive feedback from customers and their colleagues. They believe that feedback is rarely provided in their company, and that is provided purely because of the policy, not because they believe it will improve the working environment in the company. If the season lasts for 8 months, they would prefer to have feedback twice in the season, especially during the peak season when employees are under a lot of stress. Feedback can be done in person, but they believe that anonymous written feedback is also a good way for employees to feel comfortable sharing their personal experiences.

Feedback for Generation Z and Generation Y is also really important. They agreed with Generation X that most of the feedback is done mostly because the policy says so, but they hope that in the future that will change. Generation Y stated how they are working in the hospitality industries, leading by example, how they want their environment to be. Both of the generations

highlighted how they prefer frequent, in person feedback. They prefer to give and receive feedback even during the working hours in order to understand where they are performing good or bad. They said how regular meetings with feedback would be beneficial. One of the female participants from Generation Z highlighted that it was really inspiring for her to be part of weekly meetings where feedback was part of it. It made her feel comfortable because she knew where she could develop herself more in order to achieve each milestone of a final goal more smoothly.

Perceptions Across Generations

Each generation expressed their positive aspects and concerns about other generations in the workplace. All of these were based on the visible behavior in the workplace. Generation X is concerned about Generation Z and earlier generations Y because they believe that they are used to having entertainment one click away. They believe that they have high expectations about their dream job. Their experience with this generation is that they refuse doing repetitive tasks, and are always seeking to find entertainment. They believe that not every aspect of a job needs to be fulfilling and fun, and younger generations are expecting exactly that. They are also concerned about them not being loyal to the company. In their experience, a lot of younger generations would stay in the company for a couple of months or about a year. According to them, their expectations are high, and they are always seeking new experiences. They believe that the good thing is that they are much more aware and confident about their future career choice. They also expressed their gratitude toward Generation Y, because they saw a lot of changes in the system like: more empathic leadership, shorter working hours and healthier working environment. They believe that this system changed when Generation Y entered the

workplace, and are hoping that Generation Z will also contribute to the development of a healthier environment.

Generation Y agrees with Generation X about younger generations not being loyal. However, they are aware that there are many opportunities in the workplace today, and it is important for the company to stand out in a lot of components to retain their Gen Z workforce. They said how this is in one way good, because it will direct companies to change, but also Gen Z needs to be more respectful toward the company, and finish what they promised. They believe that Generation X was born in the times of uncertainty, and this influenced their behavior a lot. They believe that this generation doesn't like changes and innovation, but routine. They respect hierarchy, therefore they feel intimidated when younger generations suggest new ideas to them. On the other hand, they appreciate them being loyal and reliable to work with.

Generation Z agrees that Generation X doesn't like changes and are very hierarchical. Three out of four Gen Z participants highlighted situations where they were suggesting more innovative ideas, and Gen X just replied that they cannot change the procedure and policies that easily. They stated how they feel undervalued, just because of their age. This could be a potential connection with research done by Dr. Bharat Chillakuri, where he was asking Gen Z individuals about their workplace frustrations, and one of them was age discrimination, and repetitive tasks (Chillakuri, 2020).

They think that Generation Y is a fine middle between these three generations. They enjoy working with this generation because they are open minded and adaptive to technology. They

believe that they are more creative than them, since this generation didn't have technology and social media present in their early years.

OBSERVATIONS BEFORE AND DURING THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Before the focus group discussion started, the moderator proposed holding the discussion in the closest hotel lobby bar. Generation Z and Generation Y agreed on the location, and did not want to change it. Generation X wanted to have a discussion in one of their meeting rooms that was designed like a classroom, with clearly divided seating for the moderator and note taker, and them being participants of the focus group. Moderator suggested that we put chairs in the round in order for everyone to feel more comfortable, and participants agreed. Participants from the Generation X were joining the discussion during their working hours, and even though it was suggested to go to a close sister hotel lobby bar, they preferred to have a discussion in the meeting room.

In the focus group discussion outline, there were 10 questions, and the goal was to observe how the discussion among the participants is flowing, in order to ask sub questions, or even for participants to ask their own questions to other participants. In the discussion with Generation Z, there were 5 more sub questions developed from the conversation. Participants were actively listening, referring to their colleagues' answers, and nodding their heads when their colleagues were speaking. They were using their hands when explaining, and also actively using face cues

in order to show understanding. What was really interesting to see was one participant who was actively following the recording device, and moving it closer to the person that was speaking.

There was a low contribution from the moderator, because participants were really engaging with each other in discussion. Before the discussion started, phones were turned off and participants were not using them throughout the discussion.

During the discussion with Generation Y, there was also a low contribution needed from the moderator. The discussion was following the predetermined outline and there were additional 4 topics developed by the participants. They had long answers to each question, followed by their examples. Participants were sometimes not agreeing, but were understanding each perspective. Participants also had positive body language, they engaged their hands in explaining and showing respect and understanding by nodding their heads and touch. Before the focus group started, participants had their phones on the tables but they were turned off.

During the discussion with Generation X, there were no sub questions nor other topics developing throughout the discussion. Only the questions from the outline were answered. One out of four participants did not answer 3 questions, but only expressed agreement with colleagues, without expressing the opinion. Additionally, one out of four participants had a phone on the table, constantly checking it and asking the moderator to repeat the question. Nodding was not present in this group, but three out of four participants were using their hands when expressing their opinions.

LIMITATIONS

This research was done with participants from Croatia, and secondary research was conducted in Western countries. This could be one of the limitations, due to Croatia being a more collectivist country, while Western countries are more on the individualistic side. This was mostly seen when talking about remote working. Even though many research papers say how Generation Z and Generation Y prefers working remotely, this was not the case with the focus group participants.

Additionally, focus group participants were referring a lot to the importance of family, friends and community they live in.

Additionally, Generation Z was outside of their work and college so they felt more comfortable during the conversation. Some of the participants from Generation Y were working hybrid and they needed to have their phones close to them. Finally, Generation X was participating in the discussion during their working time and this may influence their phone being on the table and one of the participants constantly checking it. Additionally, this may influence their location choice.

Final limitation could be that this was a small sample size, and it is challenging to generalize based on a low number of participants.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

One of the suggestions could be to invite all participants to be part of the discussion outside of their working time. Having a bigger sample size or more focus groups could also provide more

accurate results. Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct both secondary and primary research based on the same culture in order to have more accurate results. It would be interesting to have a bigger focus group with all three generations present in order to come to a mutual understanding instead of just predicting why someone is behaving a certain way.

CONCLUSION

All three generations have different values, assumptions, beliefs and expectations. This is why the behavior differences are present in the workplace. This research identifies those variances, and similarities, and it is an answer to the first research question that aims to identify differences among generations. From the focus group discussions, it is evident that individuals are observing only the visible behavior of people around them. They are aware of behavior differences among generations in the workplace, which answers our second research question. However, they stated how they are not familiar with individual VABEs, and this statement is answering the third research question. As seen from the focus group discussions, what one generation perceives as respecting personal time, the other one perceives as individual being unreliable. This is connected to personal beliefs, and it is developed and stored in the core of a human being. Personal beliefs then develop assumptions, values and expectations. This research does not suggest what is right or wrong, it doesn't suggest individuals to change, but it suggests mutual understanding. The goal is to influence individuals to look under the surface and to not come to conclusions based on visible behavior only. Understanding VABEs of each individual could be beneficial for employees, managers, supervisors and HR departments to establish healthier working environments within multigenerational companies.

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