

We Have Much in Common: The Similar Inter-generational Work Preferences and Career Satisfaction Among Practicing Radiologists

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Purpose: There are many reported generational differences regarding workplace motivators, but these have not been previously studied in radiologists. The aim of this study was to assess for generational differences in workplace satisfaction and desired workplace characteristics among practicing radiologists.

Methods: An electronic survey distributed to ACR, Society of Chairs of Academic Radiology Departments, and Association of Program Directors in Radiology members generated 1,577 responses from baby boom (BG) and generation X (GX) radiologists in active practice. Nineteen workplace characteristics and their associations with workplace satisfaction were tested in a univariate analysis using χ^2 tests and in a multiple logistic regression model to test for associations with satisfaction.

Results: Workplace satisfaction among BG and GX radiologists was 78% and 80%, respectively. Both generations reported higher satisfaction if they were optimistic about the future of radiology (87% of BG vs 85% of GX radiologists), believed the difference in the desired versus expected age of retirement was narrow (1.5 ± 3.3 years for BG radiologists vs 3.0 ± 4.1 years for GX radiologists), felt that social interactions in the workplace were important (81% of BG vs 83% of GX radiologists), and believed that professionalism in their peers was important (79% of BG vs 82% of GX radiologists). BG radiologists were more satisfied if they valued staff diversity, while GX radiologists were more satisfied if they felt that job security and the amount of compensation were important. There was no significant association of satisfaction with generation, gender, practice setting, or additional administrative work.

Conclusions: Workplace satisfaction among practicing radiologists remains high but has decreased compared with prior surveys. The two dominant generations of practicing radiologists have similar workplace satisfaction rates and desired workplace characteristics.

Key Words: Workplace satisfaction, generational differences, work-life balance, generation X, baby boomers

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INTRODUCTION

The current physician workforce is composed of members from 4 different generations:

- the veteran generation, born from 1925 to 1945;
- the baby boom generation (BG), born from 1946 to 1963;
- generation X (GX), born from 1964 to 1980; and
- generation Y, born from 1980 to 2000.

About 40% of all practicing physicians (excluding those in training) are members of the BG, while 24%

are members of GX (Bridget Wesley, Direct Medical Data, personal communication, May 5, 2011). However, these two cohorts account for >90% of attending radiologists in active practice and are almost equally divided, with 47% belonging to the BG and 44% to GX (Brad Short, senior director of membership services, ACR, personal communication, April 21, 2011).

Each generational cohort brings unique skills, perspectives, and demands to the workplace that must be addressed in the appropriate context to maximize individual and practice productivity and prevent misunderstandings due to different expectations [1-9]. Both “work-life issues” and “leadership roles” were cited as areas of perceived intergenerational conflict at the 11th annual ACR Forum,

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Table 1. Characteristics assigned to the dominant generations within the current radiology workforce [6,7]

Generation	Boomer Generation	Generation X
Period born	1946-1963	1964-1980
2012 cohort age	51-68	30-50
Defining characteristics	Ambitious and idealistic, hardworking, competitive, individualistic, team-workers, experienced, seek immediate gratification	Cynical and eclectic, isolated, independent, self-reliant, resourceful, entrepreneurial, innovative and resourceful, value quality of life before career
Workplace attributes	Consent to authority, seek career stability, expect long-term job, accept paying dues	Prefer informality, seek work/life balance, expect many jobs, paying dues not needed
Career goals	Build an outstanding career	Build a transferable career
Thoughts on work/life balance	Attempt to find own way to balance needs and find meaning in their work	Demand work/life balance now with flexibility to decide what that means
Thoughts on performance reviews	Desire sit-down, formal, annual evaluations	Seek brief, but constant and immediate, feedback
Workplace motivators	Salary, job title, opportunity to refine skills	Time off for family/interests, opportunity to diversify skills

addressing “the impact of generational differences on the future of radiology” [2]. The ACR Commission on Human Resources has described recent intense generational conflict regarding retirement issues [3]. Work-family balance or imbalance is a major reported influence of workplace productivity, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and personal satisfaction with family members [5-7].

The generations and their characteristics are best viewed as a broad continuum [7,8], but some authors do assign each cohort some unique characteristics, and members tend to have similar survey responses regarding workplace values, professional attitudes, lifestyle choices, and social issues (Table 1) [1,2,5-8]. Others believe that there are few meaningful differences between generations and that those observed are more often related to differences in age [10,11]. In fact, many of these differences may be due to individual characteristics, age, or career stage and therefore not deserving of focused study or institutional response [12].

Boomers view their professions and organizations as central to their identities; they thrive on formal recognition, they prefer face-to-face communication, and they prefer to work and succeed as a team [6]. GX members see their professions as only part of their complex personal identities; they value efficient and frequent feedback, they want to define their own goals, and they tend to focus on work-family balance [6]. Differences between BG and GX members may influence workplace satisfaction and can represent an importance source of workplace tension [2-6].

Other industries have already initiated studies of intergeneration workplace trends [5] and discussed the challenges of communicating between generations in the workplace [6,9]. However, few studies have examined differences among BG and GX radiologists. Given the many reported and perceived differences influencing workplace satisfaction and work-life balance, we surveyed practicing BG and GX radiologists regarding several common workplace

motivators to identify factors associated with workplace satisfaction and possible sources of intergenerational tension.

METHODS

This study was approved by the institutional review board. A multiple-choice online survey was compiled and administered via SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>). Invitations to participate were sent electronically in March 2011 to all members of the ACR, the Association of University Radiologists, and the Society of Chairs of Academic Radiology Departments, with a follow-up invitation 4 weeks later. Members were also invited to forward the survey to their colleagues and associates. The ACR membership list contained approximately 18,900 e-mail addresses at the time of the survey; the Association of University Radiologists and Society of Chairs of Academic Radiology Departments membership lists were considered to be similar, and sample size was estimated at 19,000 survey invitations (Brad Short, personal communication, April 21, 2011). A total of 2,163 surveys were completed, for an estimated response rate of 11%.

All demographic information, including practice size, practice type, and having a component of administrative responsibility at work, was self-selected by responders. Members of the BG and GX were identified by their responses to the question for period born. Retired and in-training responders were excluded to limit the sample to only those in active practice. Responses missing data on gender, period born, or work satisfaction were also excluded. After exclusions, 1,577 BG and GX active practice radiologists were analyzed (Table 2).

Workplace characteristics listed in the survey (Online Appendix), and subjective personal opinions for “THE future of radiology” and “MY future in radiology” were recorded. There was a strong correlation between optimism for one’s personal future in radiology and

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