

# Achievement goals, satisfaction and loyalty within different generations – real differences or stereotypes

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## **Abstract:**

**Aim:** Identification of generational differences in achievement goal orientations and correlations between job satisfaction and loyalty.

**Research methods:** Analyses were based on the author's own research. The research sample comprised 306 employees, with 57 of them being baby boomers, 124 representing Generation X and 125 Generation Y. Apart from a questionnaire containing questions about satisfaction and loyalty, the survey employed the Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ) developed by Kamila Wojdyło and Sylwiusz Retowski, which draws on Elliot and McGregor's 2x2 Achievement Goal Framework (Elliot, McGregor 2001).

**Findings:** The findings show that there are no significant differences in the areas in question, which comprised satisfaction, loyalty and dominant intrinsic motivation between the analysed groups of employees. The only noticeable difference was the higher score of baby boomers on the scale of performance-avoidance goal, compared to others.

**Originality:** The originality of the paper involves the application of A. Elliot and H. McGregor's concept of Achievement Goal Theory in order to verify the actual differences between the selected generations in their approach to tasks appointed to them.

**Implications of the research:** The study is relevant to the practice of human resource management. It clearly debunks the myth of Generation Y and baby boomers as being less interested in self-growth. This finding could also provide an important argument against discriminatory practices in the recruitment process and for fostering employee growth.

**Limitation of the research:** One of the limitations of this study is using a simplified questionnaire for measuring job satisfaction and loyalty. A further limitation is the scope of the survey which did not take into account the differences in competences and approaches to team work or creativity.

**Key words:** *baby boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, achievement motivation, satisfaction, loyalty*

**JEL:** M54; M53.

## 1. Introduction

A generation is a group of people who were born at about the same time and who have common experiences, which make them share similar values and attitudes (De Muse et al. 2011). The differences between generations can also encompass aspects pertaining to occupation and may refer to such areas as: job loyalty and satisfaction (Kim et al. 2009), prosocial behaviors in the workplace (Shragay, Tziner 2011), the importance of work-life balance (Beutell i in. 2008), self-growth expectations (Wawer 2013), or motivational factors (Baran, Kłós 2014). The industry press (Deloitte 2015) as well as scientific papers emphasize the fact that it is necessary to account for the differences between individual employee generations in the human resource management processes. Adjusting the tools applied in recruitment, motivation or growth to the needs of different generations is recognized as necessary. However, the question arises, to what extent are the differences between the values and life styles favored by various generations actually reflected in the employee's occupational functioning?

In this paper, the discussion focuses on the differences that may exist in the ways occupational goals are achieved, thus, also the differences regarding the dominant type of motivation (intrinsic vs. external) of employees of different generations. That was the reason why Andrew Elliot and Holly McGregor's 2x2 goal achievement framework (Elliot, McGregor 2001) was used as the underlying basis for the paper's theoretical considerations, since it finds its application not only in sports and education (Grant, Dweck 2003; Standage et al. 2003) but also in the employee's occupational functioning, having an impact on: cooperation within a team (Baranik et al. 2013), willingness to make an effort ((Tanaka et al. 2013), job satisfaction (Wojdyło, Retowski, 2012) and taking on the leadership role (Janssen, Van Yperen 2004). Besides examining achievement motivation, the paper also seeks to explore the issue of job loyalty, in particular, in the context of job satisfaction. The question posed is whether different generation employees differ from one another in terms of job loyalty and to what extent this loyalty correlates with perceived job satisfaction.

In view of the above, the paper's aim is to identify the differences within the ways of goal achievement and interaction between job satisfaction and loyalty among employees of different generations. It is worth pointing out that although the number of publications concerned with the issue of diversity in the workplace has been growing over the last years, only few studies meet the representativeness and reliability criteria (Wojtaszczyk 2016).

# ACHIEVEMENT GOALS, SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY WITHIN DIFFERENT GENERATIONS – REAL DIFFERENCES OR STEREOTYPES

## 2. Theoretical basis

### 2.1. Generational diversity in the workplace

The analysis of generational diversity in the workplace is characterized in reference to three employee groups: baby boomers (BB), that is, persons born around the time of post-World War II demographic boom, Generation X, those born between the mid 1960' and the end of 1970's and Generation Y –born in the 1980's and up to mid 1990's. Those groups coexist with one another in various organizations creating a diverse work setting.

Numerous publications point out that the generations distinguished because of the changing economic, political and social situation are characterized by a diverse set of experiences, which is mirrored in attitudes and behaviors manifested in the workplace (Seipert, Baghurst 2014). Not only academics but also practitioners and journalists are engaged in this subject, attempting to describe the major differences between the generations (a short review of the well-known publications on this topic is presented in Table 1).

**Table 1. Common views on generations in terms of their attitudes manifested in the workplace**

Generation	Baby-boomers	X	Y
Distinguishing characteristics of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• responsibility</li> <li>• loyalty</li> <li>• importance of stabilization</li> <li>• endurance and willingness to work hard</li> <li>• low responsiveness to change and development</li> <li>• importance of the chain of command</li> <li>• justice/fairness based on equality</li> <li>• the primary motivation is financial</li> <li>• work perceived as duty</li> <li>• favoring direct communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• responsibility</li> <li>• much willingness to develop</li> <li>• willingness to take up new challenges</li> <li>• ambition to be promoted</li> <li>• high self-esteem</li> <li>• life-work separation</li> <li>• modern technologies application</li> <li>• favoring informal communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• low level of loyalty</li> <li>• work atmosphere is very important</li> <li>• willingness to take up tasks which correspond to intrinsic motivation</li> <li>• valuing diversity and exhibiting tolerance</li> <li>• expecting self-fulfillment from their job</li> <li>• they engage in team actions</li> <li>• they value participating in decision-making</li> <li>• in communication, they tend to use new technologies</li> <li>• private life and work domains penetrate each other</li> </ul>

Source: self-reported data based on: (Chojnowska, 2014; Grzesiak, 2014; Kołodziejczyk, 2010; „Pokolenie Baby Boomers, znaczy kto? - Personal Challenge”, 2015; Szymczyk, 2016).

The wide-spread views, shown in Table 1, on the occupational functioning of different generations are often stereotypes or opinions drawing on the studies focusing on American society. Within the Polish research, the studies most frequently launched are those on Generation Y (Baran, Kłós 2014, Stachowska 2012; Wawer 2013), which does not fully allow to conduct comparisons between the groups.

Considering the application of the knowledge of the differences between the generations in the practice of human resource management, two important aspects were analyzed: employees' attitudes towards self-growth and loyalty.

## **2.2. 2x2 Achievement Goal Framework**

The theory underlying the study is A. Elliot and H. McGregor's 2x2 concept of the ways to achieve goals (2001), which is rooted in the classic motivation concepts developed by John Atkinson and David McClelland. In literature, goal orientation is defined as an individual's relatively permanent disposition characterizing his or her behavior in the achievement setting in terms of manifesting and developing one's abilities (Vandewalle 1997). It is a complex theoretical construct which encompasses an individual's belief in his or her ability to achieve the goal set with this belief being dependent on: how individuals evaluate their competences and abilities and chances of achieving success, as well as their willingness to make an effort (Pintrich 2000).

According to the theory, people are different in terms of their approach to tasks they are appointed with. These differences involve, above all, two aspects, with the first one being linked to the way people approach challenges – whether, in doing their tasks, they are motivated by a desire to achieve success or whether their engagement arises rather from feeling anxious that they might fail. The second issue of significance is what reference point an individual adopts – whether his or her success is measured by intrinsic standards linked to one's own development (mastery orientation) or being compared to others (performance orientation). While taking into account striving for success vs. avoiding failure and mastery orientation vs. performance orientation, we can distinguish four approaches towards the fulfillment of one's goals (see Figure 1).

# ACHIEVEMENT GOALS, SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY WITHIN DIFFERENT GENERATIONS – REAL DIFFERENCES OR STEREOTYPES

**Figure 1. Graphical representation of the 2x2 achievement goal model**

		Reference standard	
		Absolute/ intrapersonal standard	Normative standard
direction	Approach direction	mastery-approach goal	performance –approach goal
	Avoidance direction	mastery - avoidance goal	performance – avoidance goal

Source: based on Elliot J., McGregor H.A., A 2x2 Achievement Goal Framework, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 2001, vol. 80, No 3, pp. 501-519.

Considering the above characteristics of the generations examined where the importance of being promoted at work is highlighted for Generation X, the first hypothesis was advanced:

**H1:** Generation X employees show a higher level of performance orientation.

Moreover, there are some doubts as to the way the older BB generation is described in that this group is sometimes characterized as being less motivated in terms of self-growth and sometimes as exceptionally willing to participate in training. Since in the author’s view this characteristic represents more a stereotype than a fact, the second hypothesis was advanced:

**H2:** The level of motivation relating to striving for mastery is comparable across all the generations of employees.

## 2.3. Employees’ job satisfaction and loyalty

Job satisfaction is the most frequent subject of analysis for scholars concerned with organizational behaviors (Judge, Kammeyer-Mueller 2012: 348). The classic theories of employees’ motivation allow one to assume that satisfaction represents a positive result in terms of how people perceive their job – as fulfillment of the needs of an individual, as well as a necessary requirement to trigger positive intrinsic motivation. According to Marta Juchnowicz, job

satisfaction entails more than just employees' positive attitude towards tasks appointed, as it is a state in which the employee has the sense that his or her self-esteem and self-actualization increase as a result of perceiving the job as being diverse and providing opportunities to use one's own potential (Juchnowicz 2014: 15).

Job satisfaction issues have been present in scholarly literature for many years, mainly because of the attempts aimed at identifying their impact on job productivity. A satisfied employee is expected not only to be more productive but also to show more loyalty towards his or her employer. However, the correlation between job satisfaction and loyalty is not that obvious ((Lipka, Winnicka-Wejs 2012), for job satisfaction does not preclude the wish to take up work with another employer, while having no job satisfaction does not automatically mean searching for a new job. This situation arises from the fact that loyalty is a complex construct which can be based, to a varying degree, on the three components of employees' commitment to an organization: affective, normative and continuance (Meyer, Allen, 1991). Only for affective commitment, there will be a strong correlation between satisfaction and loyalty, while loyalty based on the continuance or normative component does not require job satisfaction. Considering the fact that baby boomers are characterized as a generation that is loyal and responsible, which implies that the normative commitment plays a dominant role, the third hypothesis was advanced:

**H3:** Baby boomers employees who are not satisfied with their job will not be willing to leave their employer.

At the same time, taking into account the fact that for Generation Y emotions experienced in the workplace are of particular importance, the following hypothesis was advanced:

**H4:** Generation Y employees feeling no job satisfaction will be more likely to change their work than other generations.

### **3. Material and research tools**

The basis for measuring achievement motivation was provided by Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ) developed by Kamila Wojdyło and Sylwiusz Retowski, which draws on Elliot and McGregor's 2x2 Achievement Goal Framework (Elliot, McGregor 2001). The questionnaire consists of 20 questions grouped into four scales: mastery – approach goal, performance – approach goal, mastery – approach avoidance, performance – approach avoidance.

## ACHIEVEMENT GOALS, SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY WITHIN DIFFERENT GENERATIONS – REAL DIFFERENCES OR STEREOTYPES

The accuracy and reliability have been confirmed by studies on the Polish version of the tool (Wojdyło, Retowski 2012).

The tool was complemented by questions posed in the five-level Likert scale on job satisfaction and loyalty among employees.

The research sample comprised 306 working persons (aged between 21 -71). The study used the quota sampling method, where the distribution of gender, age and education was consistent with the surveyed population made up of working individuals<sup>1</sup>. Men accounted for a slightly bigger half of the sample, while the majority had a secondary education and the average age was 40 years. The structure of the sample is presented in Table 2. The survey was conducted in June and July of 2016.

**Table 2. The sample structure by gender, education and position**

		Size	%
gender	Woman	141	46.1%
	Man	165	53.9%
education	elementary, middle, vocational school	70	22.9%
	secondary	120	39.2%
	higher	116	37.9%
Job category	clerical	207	67.6%
	independent	44	14.4%
	management	55	18.0%

Source: self-reported data.

Given the objective of the paper, the sample was broken down into three groups of employees, in line with the generation classification most frequently adopted in research (De Meuse, Młodzik 2010). Representatives of Generation X and Y made up about 40% of the sample, with the oldest working generation accounting for less than 20% (see Table 2).

**Table 3. The proportion of generations distinguished in the sample**

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<sup>1</sup> Given the specificity of work, the survey did not include persons working in agriculture, fishery and forestry, while at the same time it was assumed that 70% of persons from this group had vocational education and that is why the number of persons with elementary and vocational education was reduced in the sample distribution

	Year of birth	Employee's age	N	%
BB	1946- 1964	70-53	57	18.6%
X	1965-1980	52-36	124	40.5%
Y	1981-1994	35-21	125	40.8%
		Total	306	100%

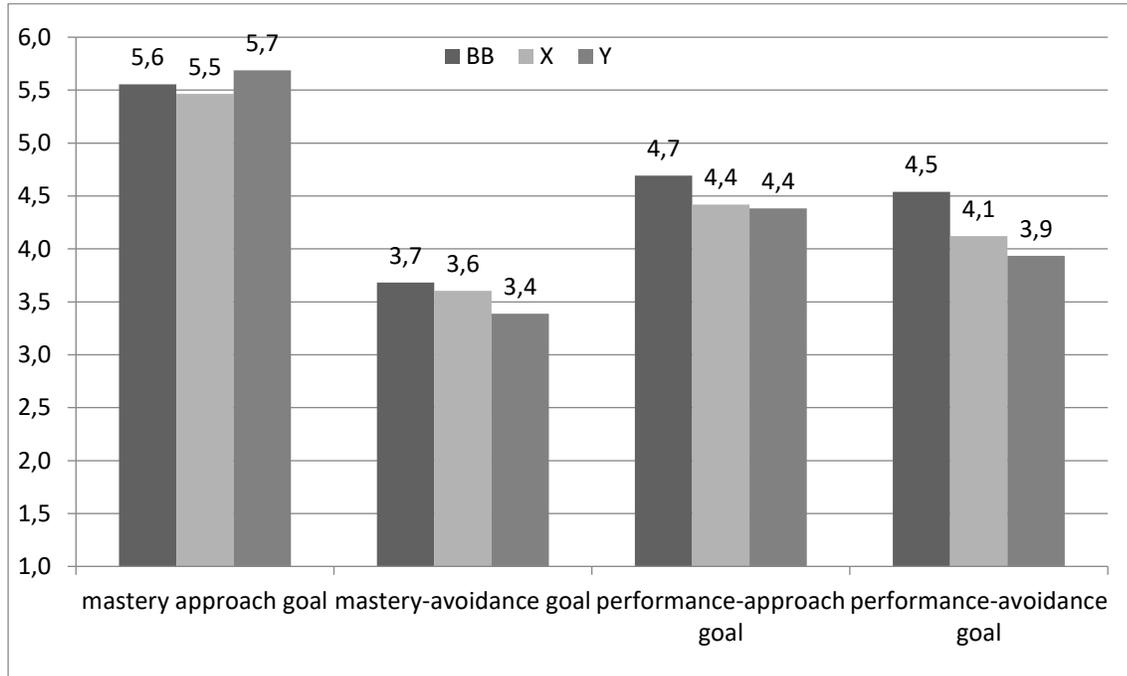
Source: self-reported data.

#### 4. Findings

The evaluation of the difference between the level of different motivations in terms of goal achievement in the groups of employees surveyed was key for the analyses conducted. The findings show that we can observe very similar scores on the scales explored among employees of the various generations. Only for the score on the “performance –avoidance goal” scale can we talk about statistically significant differences between the groups ( $F=4,16$   $p=0,016$ ). The analysis of multiple comparisons shows that in this respect baby boomers are characterized by significantly higher scores. This implies that for this generation group striving for a better performance result is caused by anxiety motivation.

## ACHIEVEMENT GOALS, SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY WITHIN DIFFERENT GENERATIONS – REAL DIFFERENCES OR STEREOTYPES

**Chart 2. Scores on the scales of AGQ by generations**



Source: self-reported data.

The findings do not warrant the acceptance of the first hypothesis suggesting the there is a higher level of performance motivation among Generation X employees. Moreover, the findings obtained allow the second hypothesis to be accepted, which asserts that there are no differences among generations in terms of pursuing mastery.

Further on, the differences in terms of job satisfaction and loyalty were examined. These findings clearly demonstrate that the groups in question do not differ from one another in terms of job satisfaction and loyalty, as reported by the surveyed (Kruskal-Wallis test showed no statistically significant differences: for satisfaction  $\chi^2=0,184$   $p=0,912$ , for loyalty  $\chi^2=0,524$   $p=0,769$ ). In terms of job satisfaction the situation is that around 60-70% of employees, regardless of their age, report that they like their job, with 20-30% having no opinion in this matter and less than 10% reporting that they are not satisfied with their job. In terms of the wish to change their job, this group is slightly more numerous, with 20-30% of members of the group concerned saying that they would change their job if they had the opportunity to do so, which confirms the fact that employees' satisfaction does not yet guarantee their loyalty.

**Table 4. Answer distribution for job satisfaction and loyalty by generations**

		generation		
		BB	X	Y
I like my job	strongly disagree	0.0%	2.5%	1.6%
	somewhat disagree	5.4%	8.2%	5.6%
	hard to say	30.4%	23.0%	21.8%
	somewhat agree	33.9%	34.4%	40.3%
	strongly agree	30.4%	32.0%	30.6%
would change my job	strongly disagree	37.5%	30.9%	25.0%
	somewhat disagree	19.6%	25.2%	28.2%
	hard to say	14.3%	17.9%	25.0%
	somewhat agree	19.6%	13.8%	12.1%
	strongly agree	8.9%	12.2%	9.7%

Source: self-reported data.

However, the key for the analyses was the evaluation of the interdependence between perceived job satisfaction and declared loyalty. In accordance with the characteristics of the generations, the expectation was that baby boomers, despite lacking job satisfaction, would not be willing to change their employer. However, the findings do not warrant the acceptance of this hypothesis, for all employees in this group who report no job satisfaction, at the same talk about being willing to change their job (see Table 5). Further to that, among those, in this employee group, who report that they like their job, there are also persons who would gladly change their job. Nor does the empirical material collected allow the fourth hypothesis to be accepted, demonstrating that among Generation Y there will be a greater proclivity to change work if there is no perceived job satisfaction. This arises from the fact that in this group of employees, among persons who do not like their job, there are also such (approximately 11%) who are not willing to change their job. What is important from the perspective of the comparative analysis, this proportion is higher than for the other groups of employees.

**Table 5. Loyalty vs. satisfaction reported by employees of different generations (% answers)**

Generation	Satisfaction	Willingness to change the job		
		I won't change it	hard to say	I will change it

## ACHIEVEMENT GOALS, SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY WITHIN DIFFERENT GENERATIONS – REAL DIFFERENCES OR STEREOTYPES

BB	I don't like	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	hard to say	23.5%	35.3%	41.2%
	I like	77.8%	5.6%	16.7%
X	I don't like	7.7%	0.0%	92.3%
	hard to say	25.0%	28.6%	46.4%
	I like	74.4%	17.1%	8.5%
Y	I don't like	11.1%	0.0%	88.9%
	hard to say	7.4%	44.4%	48.1%
	I like	71.6%	21.6%	6.8%

Source: self-reported data.

### 5. Discussion

The empirical studies conducted show no differences between the generations examined, both in terms of striving for mastery and striving for performance. The findings above are neither consistent with publicist papers (Chojnowska 2014; Grzesiak 2014) nor with earlier scholarly works which show a lower level of intrinsic motivation among baby boomers and Generation Y and a higher level of external motivation observed among Generation X (Dokadia et al. 2015). It may be that the above finding arises from using a different research tool, as well as from a different situation on the Polish labor market. The study presented herein employs the achievement goal questionnaire which examines the way a person approaches his or her challenges (Wojdyło, Retowski 2012). The findings suggest that employees regardless of their age, and thus of the generation they belong to, show similar tendencies in terms of striving for self-growth and achieving as good results as possible. Nevertheless, with respect to the oldest group of employees, we observe a greater tendency to take up actions with a view to achieve possibly best results because of possible failure anxiety. The above finding may be related to the specificity of the Polish labor market, where people over 50, being afraid of losing their job, have to prove to their employers that they are still useful for the organization.

The second aspect of the study was concerned with the verification of the stereotypes pertaining to employees' loyalty and the role job satisfaction plays in this process. Drawing on the three-factor concept of organizational commitment (Meyer, Allen 1991), and also taking into account the varied impact of satisfaction on the individual components of commitment (Antón 2009), it was assumed

that representatives of the generations in question would respond differently to perceived job satisfaction or lack of it. However, no differences between the generations were revealed in this respect either, and so the hypotheses had to be rejected.

## **6 Conclusions and research limitations**

The results obtained from the study suggest that one should be very careful when drawing conclusions with respect to generational differences in the workplace. Many of the views commonly held should be treated as stereotypes which are not reflected in the actual motivation of employees. What is particularly important for the practice of human resource management is that there are no differences in the level of motivation related to striving for mastery, and so both older and younger generations will be characterized by the similar need of self-growth. This implies that employers should not abandon training and courses in this age group as a motivation factor for employees. Discerning the self-growth potential among the generation who is over 50 years old can bring a substantial benefit for employees themselves, increasing their sense of competences and activity on the labor market, as well as for employers who will thereby ensure employees' higher work productivity and loyalty.

Moreover, the higher scores on the scales of motivation conditional on fearing to fail found among older employees could suggest a lack of security. Given the above result, it will also be to employers' advantage to ensure minimum sense of security, which could reduce the risk of sickness-related absences.

The analysis of the results in terms of the type of motivation also allows one to debunk the myths relating to generation Y, for these were the younger employees who received the highest score on the scale related to striving for proving oneself despite the fact that the proclivity to compete was largely attributed to generation X. This result can provide the basis for management by objectives and for building motivation systems based on the results obtained also in this group of employees.

However, the study has its limitations. One of them is the method of measuring employees' job satisfaction and loyalty. The study did not deploy complex tools, being only based on one question. Even though the analyses suggest that the job satisfaction tests relying on one question are similar to those using complex scales ((Nagy 2002; Wanous et al. 1997), still the author is aware of not

## ACHIEVEMENT GOALS, SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY WITHIN DIFFERENT GENERATIONS – REAL DIFFERENCES OR STEREOTYPES

having employed all job satisfaction dimensions. Another limitation is the scope of the analyses conducted which did not take into account the differences pertaining to competences, attitude to team work or creativity, as all these elements could contribute to the real differences between the generations (Każmierska-Richtert, Stankiewicz 2008). That the above elements were not included in the study does not imply that their importance has not been recognized, for the author sees the need to carry out research also in this respect. However, the most serious limitation is connected with the sample size; albeit over three hundred people took part in the survey, after having been divided into the three generations, the number of persons dissatisfied with their job proved to be relatively small (especially in the BB group). Given this situation, the findings presented in the paper and referring to the correlation between job satisfaction and job loyalty should be treated very cautiously, and in order to confirm these findings, further studies on this employee group are needed.

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## ACHIEVEMENT GOALS, SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY WITHIN DIFFERENT GENERATIONS – REAL DIFFERENCES OR STEREOTYPES

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