Conceptualizations of Career Success – Generational Differences Across Countries

AoM Annual Meeting, Anaheim 2016
Generational Differences

• Generational theory (e.g. Mannheim 1952); operationalized in popular media as Baby Boomers, Gen X etc.

• Mixed evidence that work values differ by generational cohort
  o Criticised due to methodological flaws (e.g. Parry & Urwin, 2012; Costanza & Finkelstein 2015)
  o Current categorisation of generations under question

• Little work linking generations with conceptualisations of CS
  o Evidence that generations have different career types but not that they evaluate CS differently (Dries et al 2008)
  o Evidence that younger generations change jobs more frequently (Lyons et al, 2012; Chudzikowski, 2012)
Differences across Contexts

• Generational differences may differ across different contexts
  o Experience different historical events and social trends (Mannheim, 1952)
  o Might explain mixed findings
  o e.g. China: Individualist; Collectivist and Confucianist generations (Ralston et al., 1999; Egri and Ralston, 2004)

• Proposal that values amongst younger generational cohorts are converging across national contexts (Edmunds & Turner, 2005)
  o Globalization means there are fewer differences between countries than in older generations
Research Questions

1. What are the differences between generations in relation to how individuals conceptualize career success?

2. To what extent do generations differ across certain countries?

3. To what extent are younger generations more homogenous across countries compared to older generations?
Sample and Analysis

• Two broad age groups: 18-29 years; 50+ years
  • Not subscribing to popular generational groups but two groups that are clearly separated

• Occupational groups: Managers, professionals, clerical workers, skill labour

• Countries: China (n=185), Germany (n=518), Japan (n=243), Mexico (n=224), Nigeria (n=170), US (n=273)

• Analysis: General linear model (GLM)
Findings: Age group differences

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Note: * denotes p < .05, ** denotes p < .01
Findings: Age group differences

- Overall: Age group differences in all dimensions are significant: Younger age group has higher expectations/desires

- Across-country variations: Age group differences vary across analysed countries, no uniform trend
Between-country homogeneity across age groups

Younger group more heterogeneous than older group

... more homogeneous

Results and Contributions

• Differences between age groups on all dimensions of CS
  o Support for broad generational theory but not necessarily for popular generational categories

• Generational differences are not the same across countries
  o So popular (Western) categories cannot be used universally

• Indication that higher homogeneity between countries across younger age group for some CS dimensions, but not others

• Significant implications for how organizations customize their human resource management strategies