

PREFERENCES FOR LEARNING AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT AT WORK: COMPARISON OF TWO GENERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The changing economic conditions of the current dynamic and insecure labour market make learning a constant preoccupation of the workforce with view of meeting the growing qualification demands. These demands are likely to influence the work preferences of both young people now entering the labour market and older people with established career paths. Research findings suggest that the younger generation exhibits a stronger orientation towards learning and skill development as compared to the older generations. Moreover, studies show that the younger people are more ready to leave the organization when they have better learning opportunities elsewhere. The present study aims at establishing how preferences for learning and skill development in the workplace relate to a number of job and organizational characteristics. Particular focus is placed on the predictive capacity of perceived learning opportunities towards the tendency to leave the organization for either of the two generations. The study addresses work preferences of two generations in the Bulgarian labour market. To this aim, 121 respondents answered a 55-item questionnaire consisting of newly developed scales as well as scales based on or adopted from standardized instruments such as the Extended Delft Measurement Kit (Roe et al., 2000). Contrary to findings from previous research done in countries with different cultural and socio-economic background, the older people in our sample were more eager to learn and more ready to leave their organization in pursuit of better opportunities, as compared to the younger generation. Another noteworthy conclusion is that the preferences for learning and development form different patterns in each of the two age groups and are expressed in a different way for each of the two generations.

Keywords: learning preferences, work, professional skill development, generations Y and X, tendency to leave the organization

INTRODUCTION

Sociologists claim that each generation forms common values and other specific attitudes that are different from those of other generations. The former are a product of key socio-cultural changes and political events that happened during the critical developmental years for that age group (Mannheim, 1972) such as wars and the consequences of wars, emergence of new technologies, change in the family models, economic recessions, market collapses. As all these events happen during the years critical to the socialization of the representatives of a certain age group, they influence personality, values, beliefs and expectations of these people and remain stable during adulthood.

The generational differences seem well pronounced in work settings. A growing body of empirical research suggests significant discrepancies exist in work attitudes and values among younger and older generations (Ahmed, Scott-Young, Ahmed, & Fein, 2013). According to Jean Twenge and colleagues younger generations demonstrate more external work values such as status and payment and less internal values such as interest in work (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010). Reported increase in some personality traits among young people, notably, narcissism and assertiveness, is associated with preferences for more autonomy at work. Another characteristic finding for the same age group in this study is decreased work ethics. It appears that for younger generations work plays a less central part of their lives and they tend to value leisure time more.

Generation 'Y' members (born after 1982) have been brought up receiving a lot of feedback for their performance both at home and at school. They expect to have the same feedback on every task and project in their workplace (Sujansky, & Ferri-Reed, 2009). Members of the youngest generation on the labour market expect work that is meaningful and that offers quick career growth (Dulin, 2008). Reported increased levels of narcissism and self-confidence among young people (Twenge, & Campbell, 2008) may be the reason why young people require more autonomy at work, constant feedback on their performance, meaningful tasks and fast career advancement. Increased levels of narcissism can lead to increased intentions to leave the organization, as narcissistic people are less loyal to organizations.

Other findings suggest that although younger people have less organizational involvement, they exhibit a stronger orientation towards learning (D'Amato, & Herzfeldt, 2008). According to these findings they have an increased need for learning and skill development. Employees are willing to learn on the job because they need to stay competitive in the dynamic labour market (Gabriel, 1999). Employers in a knowledge-based economy also realize the importance of constant learning and skill development of their employees, especially the younger ones (Barner, 1996). Research suggests that younger employees make an extensive use of on-the-job learning opportunities and are more ready to leave the organization when they have a better chance for learning elsewhere. They also look more readily for new opportunities with other employers when their needs in the workplace are not satisfied (D'Amato, & Herzfeldt, 2008). Opportunities for learning and development are essential to young people when deciding whether to stay in their current workplace or not.

Willingness to leave the organization varies among generations. When the person-organization values fit is weak, for instance, the tendency to leave is strong for employees of all generations (Cennamo, & Gardner, 2008). However, differences between older and younger workers do exist with respect to when they are willing to leave the organization. While both younger and older employees are inclined to leave the organization for employers offering more favourable conditions, when better opportunities arise, younger people are more willing to take the chance. As found recently (Anderson, 2013), the younger generation has less loyalty to their organization and about a quarter of the youngest employees change jobs every year.

Because of their readiness to leave the organization at any time, however, younger people realize how important it is to constantly develop their professional qualifications and skills. Orientation towards learning predicts the intention to stay in the organization for the employees of the younger generations (Cennamo, & Gardner, 2008). These employees do not expect the organization to offer security and this makes them less loyal and more ready to leave.

Although younger employees are less engaged with the organization and more engaged with their career and have a stronger tendency to leave (Cennamo, & Gardner, 2008), they may look for security of the job more than older generations (Twenge, 2010). It remains a contradictory finding that the youngest generation in the labour market is less engaged with the organization but at the same time looks for organizational security more than previous generations (Dries, Peppermans, & de Kerpel, 2008).

All these findings come from more or less homogeneous socio-economic and cultural environments, and mostly from English-speaking countries. It remains to be seen to what extent they could get support from countries with different cultural and socio-economic background. In this article we provide data from a European country (Bulgaria) where both generations are socialized in economic conditions characterized with lower wages; both generations also have prolonged experience of economic hardship.

Based on the results of the former studies, we advance the following hypotheses:

Young people today realize how important it is to keep their professional skills up-to-date in a dynamic and insecure labour market. Research shows that younger generation (known as 'Generation Y') employees value development opportunities even if they do not lead to fast upward career moves (Ahmed et al., 2013). Skill acquisition through training is more important to them than upward career growth (Rawlins, Indvik, & Johnson, 2008). Learning is not just a period but a (constant) process of skills improvement and actualization of one's professional qualification. Because learning and development are perceived differently by the different generations, it can be suggested that:

Hypothesis 1: Respondents of each of the two age groups perceive the need for learning and development in the workplace in a different way. Preferences for learning and skill development would interact with the other work preferences in specific ways for each of the two age cohorts.

Because of the increasing labour market insecurity and the constantly growing requirements for professional skills, young people realize the importance of life-long learning and skill development as a process and look for learning opportu-

nities in their work. D'Amato and Herzfeldt (2008) confirm in their studies that younger generations of employees have stronger orientation towards learning as compared to the older ones. Therefore, we can suggest that:

Hypothesis 2: The preference for learning and development at work would be stronger among members of the younger generation as compared to members of the older generation.

Generation 'Y' members view training and skills development as an essential element to advancement and professional growth (Alch, 2000). As they are more interested in building their own career and less loyal to organizations, it can be suggested that if an organization does not offer opportunities for learning and skill development to them, young people are ready to leave. They are more interested in the constant improvement of their qualification and in becoming highly skilled professionals rather than in striving to achieve a higher position in a particular organization. For members of the older generation who are characterized with more loyalty and commitment to organizations this may not be the case.

Hypothesis 3: The preference towards learning and skill-development in the workplace would be a predictor for leaving the organization for young people - the less opportunities for learning and skills development in the organization, the higher the employees' intention to leave. This is not expected to be valid for respondents of the older generation.

Two age groups were investigated - people at the beginning of their career (aged 18 to 35) and people in the middle of their career (aged 35 and above).

METHOD

The present study is focused on the preferences for learning and professional skill development at work and possible differences in this respect between two generations in the Bulgarian labour market. Although there are studies covering learning at work, they do not present a systematic view of the relations of learning preferences. We look at the wider picture of the organization and search for possible interrelations of the learning preferences with a number of job and organizational characteristics. We then compare the interrelation patterns of the two age groups. In the end we ask the question: "What happens if the preferences for learning and skill development at work are not met by the present organization one works for?" and investigate the predictive capacity of a failure to meet the learning preferences for the tendency to leave the organization. The possible generational differences are again taken into account.

The choice of indicators with possible links to the learning preferences and, at the same time, capable of differentiating between the two generations came naturally from the literature review. It appears that in comparing the two generations on their work preferences three types of variables seem to play a role. The first is the nature of the job. The review revealed that job characteristics such as autonomy and feedback at work have higher level of attractiveness for the younger generation as compared to the older one. However, the autonomous work requires self-development, acquisition of skills and, if combined with frequent

feedback on how well the job was done, can stimulate mastering new skills and tendency towards on-the-job learning. Further understanding of the preferences for learning and skill development at work seems to be linked to task variability. If the job would not require variety of skills and substantial level of work related knowledge, learning at work would be redundant.

The opportunities to be part of a closely knit work group, to have colleagues pleasant to work with, to participate in interesting team-building events and, in general, to work for an organization that offers good social contacts can be hypothesized as stimulating loyalty to the organization, particularly for young people. On the other hand, teamwork is capable of triggering positive social comparison and enable strive for learning and self development. Within a good team, learning from co-workers can be seen as easy-going and stimulating.

The second type of work related preferences that differentiate between the two generations is the organizational stimuli such as opportunities for career advancement and payment. They are directly linked to the level of job related knowledge and skills and form the basis for recruitment. It is, therefore, reasonable to expect that they could have an impact on the work-related learning and skill development.

The third group of variables covers the work outcomes such as tendency to leave the organization and work-life balance. Tendency to stay or leave the organization seems to differentiate between generations. It can be linked to preferences for learning and self-development at work quite directly - as shown earlier (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008), young people tend to leave organizations that do not offer good learning opportunities.

Opportunities for flexible working schedule and occasional work from home were recorded in the literature as appealing to young people (Ahmed, Scott-Young, Ahmed, & Fein, 2013). Flexible working hours are closely related to the balance between work and private life and, at the same time, are increasingly looked at as specific stimuli that an organization can offer as points of attraction to their employees (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010).

These theoretical considerations suggest using the following measures: Apart from preferences for learning and professional skill development, the job characteristics include variety of tasks and skills on the job, autonomy, feedback, and flexible working hours. Preferences for organizational stimuli include pay and career advancement. Preferences for work outcomes are represented by tendency to leave the organization and work-life balance.

MEASURES

The preferences for learning and professional skill development at work refer to the wish for opportunities in the workplace to increase one's professional knowledge and acquire new skills in order to stay competitive on the labour market. This scale was developed by the authors based on a scale taken from Robert A. Roe, Irina L. Zinovieva, Elizabeth Dienes and Laurens A. Ten Horn (2000). The four authors offer an instrument (Extended Delft Measurement Kit), which covers large spectrum of the organizational life, including most of the scales necessary for the present

study. The added advantage is that they are also standardized for the Bulgarian population. The scale of preferences for learning and professional skill development at work was based on the scale Opportunities for personal growth at work. A part of the items expressing the self-actualization tendency was replaced by items reflecting the opportunities to acquire new skills and knowledge at work. Example item: "It is important to me to constantly improve my professional qualification".

Preferences for good social contacts refer to the friendly atmosphere at work and good interpersonal relationships in the workplace. This is a new scale with 4 items. Example item: "It is important to me to have good social relationships and a cooperative team in my workplace".

The job characteristics were measured by the scales taken from Job Descriptive Survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) as standardized for Bulgaria by R. A. Roe, I. L. Zinovieva, E. Dienes and L. A. Ten Horn (2000). Variety of tasks and skills on the job means having varying and not monotonous tasks. Autonomy refers to independence and control when doing tasks or making decisions about how to perform the work and in what sequence to execute job tasks. Feedback is the information about the performance of tasks received from the work process itself, as well as from colleagues, managers or clients. Preference for flexible working hours covers the working schedule - is it fixed or flexible. The latter scale was created specifically for the present study. It has two items. Example item: "It is important to me to have a job that is not strictly connected to a fixed workplace and work hours".

Preferences for career advancement reflect the perception of availability of options for career advancement and their importance for the person. Preferences for payment express how important is the absolute and relative level of payment in a given organization. The tendency to leave expresses the readiness to leave the current employer and to look for a new one. The scales to measure the three latter concepts were adopted from R. A. Roe, I. L. Zinovieva, E. Dienes and L. A. Ten Horn (2000).

A new scale was developed to measure the work-life balance. It contains three items representing the way of combining one's professional duties with one's private life, family life, and leisure time activities. Example item: "The balance between work and private life is extremely important to me".

The questionnaire ends with 6 questions asking demographic data from the respondents, and namely gender, age, occupation, level of education, years of professional experience, current place of residence. The questionnaire was filled by the respondents in Internet as well as on paper copies. For all measures a 5-point Likert-type scale was used for evaluation, with 1 - Completely agree; 2 - Agree; 3 - Agree as much as disagree; 4 - Disagree; 5 - Completely disagree.

DATA ANALYSIS

The first stage of data analysis has to establish the properties of the scales - both internal consistency and normality of the distribution. Cronbach's Alpha and Kolmogorov - Smirnov Z-test are used (respectively) for these procedures. To investigate the relations among preferences for learning and professional skill development in the workplace and other work characteristics we perform Pearson Correlation ana-

lysis. Since we expect differences between the two age groups, the correlations are computed for each group and the patterns are compared. In the end, we check the predictors for the tendency to leave (using regression analysis) with particular focus on the interpretation of the preferences for learning and skill development at work.

SAMPLE

The respondents in this study are representatives of two generations – people from 18 to 35 years of age who are entering the labour market and establishing their professional positions, and people above 35 years of age who are in the middle of their career development. This division of generations is based on the assumption that people under 35 years in Bulgaria have grown up in different socio-economic and political circumstances compared to people above this age. People under 35 years of age have grown up in the period of transition to market economy – a period marked by political turmoil, opening of national borders and markets and fast globalization processes. Because of the different socio-economic conditions in which they have grown up and become socialized, the two generations are likely to have developed different attitudes towards work.

RESPONDENTS

The following demographic characteristics of respondents are presented – age, sex, education and years of professional practice.

In total, 121 respondents returned completed questionnaires. The sample composition is as follows (Table 1). Men constitute 39.7% of the sample, women – 60.3%. The younger generation (age 18-35 years) represents 56.2%, while those above 35 years of age - 43.8%.

Tab. 1. Demographic data for the two age groups (generations), N=121.

	Respondents up to 35 years		Respondents above 35 years	
	N	%	N	%
Sex:				
Men	24	35.3	24	45.3
Women	44	64.7	29	54.7
Level of education:				
Secondary	13	19.1	3	5.7
College	9	13.2	16	30.2
University	46	67.6	33	62.3
Years of professional experience:				
0-1	21	30.9	0	-
2-5	35	51.5	0	-
6-10	11	16.2	6	11.3
11-20	1	1.5	13	24.5
Above 20	0	-	33	62.3
Total:	68		53	

Source: Authors' research.

The education level of 79 respondents (65.3%) was completed university degree, 25 respondents had college education (20.7%), and secondary education was the highest qualification for 16 respondents (13.2%). Up to one year was the professional experience of 21 persons (17.4%), another 28.9% had between two and five years, 14% between 6-10 years, 11.6% - 11-20 years, and 27.3% - more than 20 years of professional experience.

RESULTS

Analysis of scales - reliability and distribution

According to general classifications, the measure of reliability - Cronbach's Alpha - lower than 0.50 makes the scale unreliable, from 0.50 to 0.60 shows weak reliability, from 0.60 to 0.70 - middle level reliability, from 0.70 to 0.80 - reliability good for practical purposes, while Cronbach's Alpha above 0.80 gives high reliability. Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) recommend that Cronbach's Alpha is ≥ 0.65 . Table 2 below shows the statistics for the scales used in the present study.

Tab. 2. Statistics for all scales – number of items, mean, standard deviation, Cronbach's Alpha, Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z test.

Scale	Number of items	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z test
Variety of tasks and skills on the job	3	4.525	1.685	.515	2.892**
Autonomy	7	13.268	3.660	.668	1.282
Feedback	4	6.719	2.377	.664	1.716**
Social contacts	4	6.658	2.155	.621	1.862**
Learning and self-development	5	7.691	2.779	.768	2.048**
Career advancement	2	3.831	1.786	.775	2.020**
Payment	3	4.125	1.580	.636	3.050**
Tendency to leave the organization	5	14.100	4.622	.705	1.371*
Work-life balance	3	9.363	3.766	.733	1.702**

*Statistical significance at $p < 0.05$; **Statistical significance at $p < 0.01$.

Source: Authors' research.

According to the above-mentioned classification the scales 'Autonomy', 'Feedback', 'Learning and self-development', 'Career advancement', 'Tendency to leave the organization' and 'Work-life balance' have good reliability (Cronbach's Alpha is ≥ 0.65). One of the scales - 'Flexible work hours' - was removed from further analysis because of very low reliability.

In order to check the empirical distribution of our data, we conducted Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z test. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z test showed that most scales are normally distributed. In the case of one of the scales - 'Autonomy' - the p value is approaching statistical significance (p value=.075). Therefore, we can

Tab. 3. Pearson correlations of the scales for the age cohort up to 35 years, N=68.

	Tendency to leave	Autonomy	Career advancement	Learning and development	Feedback	Payment	Balance	Social contacts
Autonomy	.105							
Career advancement	.147	.199						
Learning and development	.198	.231	.439**					
Feedback	.193	.238	.363**	.283*				
Payment	.071	.374**	.506**	.322**	.245*			
Balance	.690**	.196	.005	.083	.158	.128		
Social contacts	.089	.140	.345**	.163	.246*	.272*	.313**	
Variety	-.094	.320**	.399*	.277*	.183	.349**	-.183	.109

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level; ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Source: Authors` research.

Tab. 4. Pearson correlations of the scales for the age cohort above 35 years of age, N=53.

	Variety	Autonomy	Feedback	Social contacts	Learning and development	Career advancement	Payment	Tendency to leave
Autonomy	.627**							
Feedback	-.094	-.104						
Social contacts	.170	-.084	.436**					
Learning and development	.071	.254	.423**	.471**				
Career advancement	.164	.226	-.108	.043	.476**			
Payment	.380**	.321*	.035	.115	.298*	.542**		
Tendency to leave	-.145	-.020	.060	.001	.025	.024	-.149	
Balance	-.005	.016	.009	.044	-.025	-.173	-.147	.674**

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level; ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Source: Authors` research.

assume that the data is normally distributed and apply parametric statistical tests to the data and particularly Pearson correlation in this case in order to check our first hypothesis.

Hypotheses Testing

In order to check Hypothesis 1, Pearson correlations were calculated within each of the two age cohorts separately. Table 3 shows the results for the younger generation, Table 4 - the ones for the older generation.

The data shows that within the two age groups the scale "Learning and professional skill development" interacts somewhat differently with the other scales. There are basic similarities between the two generation in their preferences for learning in the workplace but there are also significant differences. As shown in the Table 3, for the younger generation, the preferences for learning and development in the workplace form a cluster together with the preferences for career advancement ($r = .439^{**}$), higher pay ($r = .322^{**}$), and better feedback ($r = .283^*$). The stronger preferences for good opportunities for learning and skills improvement are associated with preferences for better career advancement and higher payment. Preferences for intensive learning on the job go hand-in-hand with expectations for clear feedback for the quality of task performance. The same pattern can be found in the older cohort of respondents. In this cohort the scale "Learning and development" forms a cluster with the preferences for career advancement ($r = .476^{**}$), feedback ($r = .423^{**}$) and payment ($r = .298^*$). For the older workers preferences for more feedback seem to play a stronger role with regard to preferences for learning opportunities as compared to the preferences of younger employees.

There are also interesting differences between the two generations. In the younger group the preference for learning and self-development correlates significantly with the preference for having various tasks and using various skills at work ($r = .277^*$). This finding corresponds to results from previous research - young people today want to learn different skills in order to become highly skilled professionals rather than as a way to acquire a higher position within the organization (Rawlins et al., 2008).

In the older group (Table 4) the preference for learning and self-development correlates significantly with the preference for social contacts in the workplace ($r = .471^{**}$). According to this finding, the more social contacts the older workers have in the workplace, the more they learn. While for younger people learning correlates with more variety of professional skills, for older people it correlates with more social contacts on the job. This partly confirms Hypothesis 1 - there are both similarities and differences in the way each of the two age groups defines their preference for learning and development in the workplace.

In order to check Hypothesis 2, the means of each age cohort were compared by performing one-way ANOVA tests. Besides the scale 'Learning and development' the other scales were included, too in order to check if there are significant differences between the two generations. In the table below the means and standard deviation for all 9 scales are shown as per age group (generation).

Tab. 5. One-way ANOVA for each scale per generation - means, standard deviation and F-criterion.

Scale	Respondents 18-35 years		Respondents above 35 years		F
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Variety of tasks and skills on the job	4.411	1.395	4.673	2.007	0.707
Autonomy	13.397	3.434	13.098	3.971	0.193
Feedback	6.338	2.134	7.207	2.597	4.084
Social contacts	6.764	2.312	6.519	1.945	0.380
Learning and skill-development	7.014	2.085	8.547	3.290	9.643**
Career advancement	3.242	1.348	4.566	1.995	18.531**
Payment	4.074	1.510	4.188	1.676	0.153
Tendency to leave the organization	13.268	4.176	15.150	4.974	5.075*
Work-life balance	9.397	3.797	9.320	3.761	0.012

*Statistical significance at $p < 0.05$; **Statistical significance at $p < 0.01$.

Source: Authors' research.

According to the means in Table 5, younger people value autonomy, social contacts and work-life balance more than people above 35 years. People above 35 years put more value on the variety of tasks and skills on the job, feedback, learning and self-development, career advancement and tendency to leave the organization.

However, only part of the differences between the preferences of the two age groups reached statistical significance, and not in the expected direction.

Notably, that is true for the preferences towards learning and development: it turns out that the older respondents (above 35 years of age, mean = 8.55) have stronger preferences for learning and development opportunities in the workplace than younger people (up to 35 years, mean = 7.01; $F = 9.643$, $p < 0.01$). This rejects Hypothesis 2 – “The preference for learning and development at work would be stronger among members of the younger generation as compared to members of the older generation”.

The finding that older people have stronger preferences for improvement of the professional skills and competences in their workplace can be explained with the fact that being older and more experienced they better realize the risk of remaining non-competitive on the labour market. For them such a threat might be considered having heavier consequences as (on average) they might be expected to have dependants (families and children to take care of). On the other hand, the weaker preference of younger people for learning and development can be explained with the fact that they have acquired their professional qualifications more recently and as a consequence do not need an urgent update of their knowledge and skills. It may be that with the advancement of age people need to a higher degree an update of their competences and skills through training.

Another possible explanation would be the fast expansion of high technologies in workplaces today. Younger people who have grown up using high technology are better acquainted with these technologies in the workplace and do not need to get used to them (Herschatter & Epstein, 2010) while for older people these technologies are a novelty and therefore they need skill update and training.

The results show other significant differences between the two generations as well. Members of the older generation have stronger preferences towards career advancement (mean = 4.57) than younger people (mean = 3.24) and this is statistically significant with $F = 18.53$ at $p < 0.01$. This difference can be due to the career stage rather than to the generation. While young people are still experimenting with various areas of work or are establishing professional positions, older people have already chosen their preferred professional direction and have invested a lot in their career development. Therefore, they aspire for higher and more prestigious positions in their chosen occupation. It is understandable in their career stage to have goals of career advancement and professional success.

Thus, preferences for learning and development are strongly positively correlated to preferences for career advancement ($r = .476^{**}$) for respondents of the older generation. At the same time these preferences are strongly expressed among them rather than among members of the younger generation ($F = 9.643^{**}$ for the scale 'Learning and development' and $F = 18.531^{**}$ for the scale 'Career advancement'). It can be concluded that these constructs are strongly interrelated and that members of the older generation of respondents view opportunities for learning and development in the workplace as a way to advance in their career.

For the younger generations of respondents the scales 'Learning and development' and 'Career advancement' are also positively correlated ($r = .439^{**}$). Therefore, they also see learning and development of skills as a way to advance in their career but this is more weakly expressed (the means for both variables are lower for the younger generation).

Results of the one-way ANOVA tests also demonstrate that respondents above 35 years are more inclined to leave their current organization than respondents under 35 years. A possible explanation might be that members of the older generation feel more confident in their profession having more experience and, therefore, can more easily look for new career opportunities. It is already clear from the results that they value opportunities for learning and development and for career advancement. The three variables are interconnected – in order to grow professionally, one needs to learn new skills and should be "ready to leave" if an organization does not offer learning opportunities. On the other hand, career advancement is often not possible within a single organization.

In Table 6 the differences in the means of the scales between the two generations that are statistically significant are shown for reference.

In order to check Hypothesis 3 regression analysis was performed with the scale 'Tendency to leave' as dependent variable and the other scales as independent variables. The regression analysis was performed for each of the two age cohorts separately assuming that there are different predictors of the tendency to leave the organization for each age cohort. The results are presented in Tables 7 and 8.

Tab. 6. Differences in scale means between the two generations that are found statistically significant.

Scale	Generation	Difference in the means of the scales
Learning and self-development	Respondents above 35 years > Respondents up to 35 years	1.5323**
Career advancement	Respondents above 35 years > Respondents up to 35 years	1.3236**
Tendency to leave the organization	Respondents above 35 years > Respondents up to 35 years	1.8822*

*Statistical significance at $p < 0.05$; **Statistical significance at $p < 0.01$.

Source: Authors' research.

Tab. 7. Predictors of the tendency to leave the organization for the respondents above 35 years. Model summary.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of estimate
1	.740	.548	.461	3.71

Source: Authors' research.

Tab. 8. Predictors of the tendency to leave the organization for the respondents above 35 years. Coefficients.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	4.701	3.363		1.398	.169
Work-life balance	.955	.143	.708	6.698	.000
Career advancement	.789	.381	.312	2.072	0.044
Feedback	.212	.255	.107	.831	.411
Autonomy	.202	.197	.159	1.024	.311
Social contacts	.160	.362	.061	.443	.660
Learning and development	-.343	.270	-.210	-1.268	.212
Payment	-.344	.401	-.115	-.858	.396
Variety	-.620	.391	-.247	-1.584	.121

Source: Authors' research.

The regression analysis demonstrates good predictability of the model - Adjusted R Square = .461. This means that the model explains 46% of the tendency to leave the organization for the respondents above 35 years. As it can be seen from the Tables 7 and 8, for respondents older than 35 years of age the only predictors for their tendency to leave the present employer that are statistically significant are

'Work-life balance' (B = .955) (Sig. = 000, at $p < 0.001$) and 'Career advancement' (B = .789) (Sig. = 0.04, at $p < 0.05$). For the respondents above 35 years the preferences for work-life balance and for career growth determine their decision to stay in the organization or to leave. When they need more work-life balance and want to advance professionally, they are more ready to leave. The relation between 'Tendency to leave' and the predictors 'Feedback' (B = .212), 'Autonomy' (B = .202) and 'Social contacts' (B = .160) is positive while its relation to 'Learning and development' (B = -.343), 'Payment' (B = -.344) and 'Variety of skills and tasks' (B = -.620) is negative. However, these relations are not statistically significant. The independent variables were removed one by one from the regression equation starting from the most insignificant one in order to check if this changes the predictive power of the model. The independent variables "Social contacts", "Payment", "Feedback" and "Autonomy", "Learning and development", "Variety" and "Career advancement" were removed from further analysis. The results are shown in the tables 9 and 10 below.

Tab. 9. Predictors of the tendency to leave the organization for the respondents above 35 years. Model summary.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of estimate
1	.674	.454	.443	3.71

Source: Authors' research.

Tab. 10. Predictors of the tendency to leave the organization for the respondents above 35 years. Coefficients.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	6.845	1.374		4.983	.000
Work-life balance	.891	.137	.674	6.510	.000

Source: Authors' research.

This model explains 44% of the tendency to leave the organization (Adjusted R Square = .443) for the respondents above 35 years. As it can be seen, the model is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. This is the total statistical significance of the model. The only reliable predictor for the tendency to leave the organization for respondents over 35 years is the preference for balance between work and private life (B = .891). The more needs for a good balance between private life and work they have, the higher is their intention for leaving. This relation is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.

Tab. 11. Predictors of the tendency to leave the organization for the respondents under 35 years. Model summary.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.747	.558	.495	2.96

Source: Authors' research.

Tab. 12. Predictors of the tendency to leave the organization for the respondents under 35 years. Coefficients.

Model	Unstan- dardized coeffi- cients		Standard- ized coef- ficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	5.876	2.074		2.833	.006
Work-life balance	.832	.110	.760	7.545	.000
Career advancement	.519	.364	.168	1.426	.159
Learning and devel- opment	.194	.201	.098	.968	.337
Payment	.139	.381	.042	.365	.716
Feedback	.082	.191	.042	.426	.672
Variety	-.048	.313	-.016	-.154	.878
Autonomy	-.107	.123	-.089	-.870	.388
Social contacts	-.411	.179	-.231	-2.291	.026

Source: Authors` research.

The regression analysis demonstrated good predictability of the model – Adjusted R Square = .495 (Table 11). This means that the model explains almost 50% of the tendency to leave the organization for the respondents under 35 years. In this case two predictors for the tendency to leave the organization are statistically significant for this group of respondents (Table 12). These are ‘Work-life balance’ (B = .832) (Sig. = .000, at $p < 0.001$) and ‘Social contacts’ (B = -.411) (Sig. = .026, at $p < 0.05$). The relation between ‘Work-life balance’ and ‘Tendency to leave’ is positive – the more preferences for combining work with private life, the higher the intention to leave. The relation between ‘Social contacts’ and ‘Tendency to leave’ is negative – the more preferences for social contacts, the lower the intention for leaving. The scale ‘Social contacts’ refers to the social climate in the workplace – friendly relationships to colleagues, good teamwork, contacts with interesting people. From these results it can be concluded that lack of friendly social environment at work can predict the intention of young people to leave the organization. The establishment of good social relationships in the workplace and successful teamwork determines their intention to stay in the organization.

The other independent variables do not have a statistically significant effect on the tendency to leave. However, the total model is statistically significant (Sig. = .006, at $p < 0.01$). The independent variables were removed one by one from the regression equation starting from the most insignificant one in order to check if this changes the predictive power of the model. The scales ‘Variety’, ‘Payment’, ‘Feedback’, ‘Autonomy’, ‘Learning and development’ were removed from further analysis. The results are presented below.

Tab. 13. Predictors of the tendency to leave the organization for the respondents under 35 years. Model summary.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.737	.543	.521	2.89

Source: Authors' research.

Tab. 14. Predictors of the tendency to leave the organization for the respondents under 35 years. Coefficients.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	6.013	1.380		4.358	.000
Work-life balance	.837	.100	.765	8.396	.000
Career advancement	.683	.285	.221	2.396	.020
Social contacts	-.401	.173	-.225	-2.324	.023

Source: Authors' research.

The regression analysis (Table 13) demonstrated good predictability of the model - Adjusted R Square = .521. This means that the model explains 52% of the tendency to leave the organization for the respondents under 35 years.

As it can be seen from the Tables 13 and 14, the model is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. The total statistical significance of the model is very good. The joint effect of the preferences for 'Work-life balance' ($B = .837$), 'Career advancement' ($B = .683$) and 'Social contacts' ($B = -.401$) predicts the tendency to leave the organization for young people. The relation between 'Tendency to leave' and 'Work-life balance' and 'Career advancements' is positive - the more preferences for combining work and private life, the higher the tendency to leave. The more preferences for career growth young people have, the more they are inclined to leave the organization. According to this result, young people expect to reach higher positions in other organizations, not in the one they work at present. The relation between 'Social contacts' and 'Tendency to leave' is negative - the stronger the preferences for friendly working environment, the lower the intention to leave and vice versa. Good social relationships in the workplace increase the intention of young people to stay.

The effect of each predictor on the tendency to leave is statistically significant - 'Work-life balance' (Sig. = .000, at $p < 0.001$), 'Career advancement' (Sig. = .020, at $p < 0.05$) and 'Social contacts' (Sig. = .023, at $p < 0.05$). The total model is also statistically significant (Sig. = .000) at $p < 0.001$.

The preferences for learning and development of professional skills have no predictive power over the tendency to leave the organization for neither of the two age cohorts. Contrary to our expectations, learning and development of skills does not seem to be related to the decision of staying in the organization for the younger generation of respondents. The improvement of qualification and the acquisi-

tion of new knowledge do not affect their decision to leave the organization or to stay in it. Therefore, hypothesis 3 – “The preference towards learning and professional skill-development in the workplace would be a predictor for leaving the organization for young people – the less opportunities for learning and skills development in the organization, the higher will be the employees’ intention to leave. This is not expected to be valid for respondents of the older generation”- was not confirmed. It was confirmed only in its second part as far as the older generation of respondents is regarded.

CONCLUSION

Two age groups were investigated about their work preferences. In total 121 respondents were divided into a group of people under the age of 35 years and a group of people above that age. The aim was to study the preferences for learning and skill development at work and their relations with other work preferences in the two generations. It was found that the preference for learning and skill development at work correlates significantly with the preferences for career advancement, higher payment, and better feedback from the work process and co-workers.

Remarkable differences between the two age cohorts were observed. While in the younger group of respondents the need for learning and development correlates significantly with the variety of tasks and skills at work, in the older cohort it correlates with the social contacts in the workplace. This leads to the conclusion that the preferences for learning and development form different clusters in each of the two age groups and are expressed in a different way for each of the two generations.

Contrary to expectations and findings in previous research as outlined in the literature review, older people from our sample turned out to value more the opportunities for learning and development at work as compared to the younger employees.

Another noteworthy finding of the present study is that our older respondents are more willing to leave their current organization compared to the younger age group: they are interested in advancing in their careers and are prepared to look for opportunities outside their current organization. The former finding stands in sharp contradiction to the findings from previous research claiming that members of the Generation ‘Y’ (born after 1982) are more ready to leave and they do in fact leave their current employers at a high pace (determined in one study as one out of four young people every year).

Our results showed that the preference for learning and development has no predicting ability for the intention of leaving the organization neither for the younger respondents, nor for the older ones. The strong preferences for better work-life balance influence positively the decision to leave the organization for both generations. This is the only reliable predictor of the tendency to leave for the older respondents. For the younger generation, besides the preference for combining work and private life, the preference for achieving higher professional positions and good social climate in the workplace are also predictors for their intention to leave or stay within the organization. The more young people wish to advance in their career, the more willing they are to leave their current organization. The more they believe they have good social relationships with colleagues and work in a friendly team, the less inclined they are to leave.

The findings from the present study suggest possible implications for the human resource management of employees from different generations. Our data show that supporting the teamwork and the good social environment in the workplace decreases the intention for leaving of younger people. Giving them opportunities for combining work and family life and for advancing professionally within the organization has the capacity to support their decision to stay. Good work-life balance could also strengthen the intention to stay in the organization of the older generation. Offering more learning and skill development in the workplace, however, cannot be expected to prevent the decision to leave the organization of employees of either age group.

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