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**AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE
CHARACTERISTICS OF
GENERATIONAL COHORTS AT WORK**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Human Resource Management
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Abstract

It has been suggested in the media and popular literature that there are significant differences between the generational cohorts (Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y) and that organisations, therefore, need to manage people from each cohort differently. However, the evidence is largely anecdotal. In contrast, empirical studies investigating generational cohorts have provided no consistent picture of a generational cohort's values and characteristics. This thesis investigates whether the popular characteristics of generational cohorts are valid. A total of 164 participants completed a 69-item questionnaire developed from constructs elicited from 64 repertory grid interviews in which participants identified constructs and rated their importance in their ideal job. More similarities than differences between the cohorts were found, providing limited support for the assertion in the popular literature that there are differences between the generational cohorts. Limited support was found for the depiction of each of the cohorts in the popular literature and empirical studies. In addition, strong support was found for heterogeneity within cohorts, in particular with respect to gender. The use of linear discriminant analysis identified that only nine of the 69 questions provided a reasonable level of discrimination between the generational cohorts, further supporting the finding that there are more similarities than differences between the cohorts. By removing participants from the cusp years (i.e., either side of the cut-off date for cohorts) the predictive accuracy of correctly assigning participants to the correct cohort increased, supporting the assertion that cohorts are most distinct in the middle and less distinct at the edges. This study contributes to the literature through the development of a sound psychometric model for researching generational cohorts and by providing valuable insight into what the different generational cohorts most value in the workplace. The results challenge the depiction of generational cohorts depicted in the popular literature and identified that while there are some differences between the cohorts, there are more similarities than differences. This raises the suggestion that there may be greater heterogeneity within generational cohorts than between them. People are complex and cannot be summed up by a small set of statements or stereotype. In the end, there can be no substitute for managers engaging with employees individually to understand their particular values.

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List of Publications

Peer Reviewed Journal Articles

- 2006 Lyon, K; Legg, S and Toulson, P
Generational Cohorts: What are they and what are the implications for management?
International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations, Volume 5 (1), 89-98
- 2011 Murray, K; Toulson, P and Legg, S
Generational cohort's expectations in the workplace: A study of New Zealanders
Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources, 49 (4), 476-493

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- 2010 Murray, K; Legg, S and Toulson, P
Meeting the expectations of generational cohorts in the workplace – A study of New Zealanders
Conference proceedings from the Human Resources Institute of New Zealand Research Forum, 18th November 2010, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.
http://researchforum.hrinz.org.nz/Site/events_national/Research_Forum/programme.aspx

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- 2004 Lyon, K; Legg, S & Toulson, P
Diversity management: A generational cohort perspective.
Human Resources Institute of New Zealand Magazine, June, pg18-20
- 2011 Murray, K; Legg, S & Toulson, P
Sheep in wolves' clothing
NZATD People and Performance, February – March, 21-23

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- 2010** Murray, K
Meeting the expectations of generational cohorts in the workplace – A study of New Zealanders
Presentation at the Human Resources Institute of New Zealand Research
Forum
18th November 2010, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.
http://researchforum.hrinz.org.nz/Site/events_national/Research_Forum/programme.aspx