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## Article

# Does the effect of person-environment fit on work attitudes vary with generations? Insights from the tourism industry

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## Does the Effect of Person-Environment Fit on Work Attitudes Vary with Generations? Insights from the Tourism Industry

### Abstract

There is an intrinsic link between the success of service firms and the availability of high-quality human resources, making employee attitudes and behaviors a critical concern for service organizations. This paper examines the role of generational differences in the relationship between person-environment fit, job satisfaction and work engagement in the tourism industry. The study was based on a group of 981 tourism employees in 15 localities in Poland. Data were collected through self-administered paper-based questionnaires. The hypothesized relationships were tested using a hierarchical regression analysis. This research revealed that Generation Y employees experienced lower job satisfaction, lower work engagement, and a lower degree of needs being met in the workplace than did their predecessors. It was also found that person-group fit was a stronger predictor of work attitudes for Millennials. The paper contributes to the ongoing debate on generational diversity in the workplace and its implication for human resources management. Specifically, in the service context, it adds a generational perspective of the person-environment fit influence on work-related attitudes.

**Keywords:** person-environment fit, job satisfaction, work engagement, generation, tourism industry, Poland

**JEL:** J28, M54, L83

## Introduction

Despite the rapid development of information and communication technologies, interpersonal interactions continue to play a crucial role in many service industries. Managing employee attitudes and behaviors is therefore one of the most challenging tasks for contemporary high-contact service organizations. Numerous scholars [e.g. Barron, Leask, Fyall, 2014; Bednarska, Olszewski, 2014; Cairncross, Buultjens, 2010; Kachniewska, Para, 2014; Park, Gursoy, 2012], have commented that the generation now entering the workforce – Generation Y (Millennials) – presents new challenges rooted in noticeably different work-related attitudes and higher expectations of their work environment than prior generations. Higher expectations may lead to a lower person-environment (P-E) fit, which, in turn, may stimulate counterproductive and withdrawal behaviors. This seems especially true in the tourism industry, which traditionally relies on young workforce [Lub et al., 2012; Solnet, Kralj, Kandampully, 2012].

Tourism is a growing industry, that makes a substantial contribution to employment. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council [2016], this sector employs more people than the automotive manufacturing, chemicals, banking, and mining industries combined across entire economy. Tourism supports (directly and indirectly) 9.5% of all jobs worldwide and 4.3% of all jobs in Poland. Growth in this sector is expected to be continued, and outpace overall economic growth during the next decade. To fulfill this growth potential, however, the tourism industry needs to attract the people with appropriate skills to effectively build its long-term competitive advantage.

There is growing empirical evidence supporting the notion that the fit between individuals and their work environments affects both pre-entry and post-entry attitudes, intentions, and behaviors in the workplace. Recent meta-analytical studies [Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, Johnson, 2005; Oh et al., 2014] confirmed that P-E fit was significantly associated with outcomes reported by prospective employees, employing organizations, and current employees. Although there has been abundant research involving fit between jobholders and their environments, the understanding of the phenomenon is primarily based on studies conducted in North America. Yet the topic is important for academia and managerial practices globally [Oh et al., 2014]. Furthermore, despite calls for a multidimensional approach to studying fit, most research has focused on individual's fit with a single aspect of the work environment [Jansen, Kristof-Brown, 2006]. Additionally, very few papers present a generational perspective on workplace fit [for exceptions, see Cennamo, Gardner, 2008; Westerman, Yamamura, 2007]. Finally, notwithstanding the proliferation of studies on human resources in tourism, P-E fit and its outcomes have rarely been investigated empirically. The present research addresses these gaps by exploring whether there is a role of generational differences in shaping the links between P-E fit dimensions and employee work attitudes in Poland's tourism industry.

The paper contributes to the ongoing debate on generational diversity in the workplace and its implications for human resources management. The objective of this study is to examine the moderating role of generational differences in the relationship between P-E fit, job satisfaction and work engagement in the tourism industry. In doing so, the paper describes the concept of P-E fit and its consequences based on the existing literature. The research hypothesis, which is derived from this review, is then presented, followed by a description of the methodology used and study results. The last section includes a summary of the most important findings and suggests directions for future research.

## **Person-Environment Fit and Its Consequences**

### **– Literature Review**

The interaction of workers and their work environments has attracted researchers attention for decades. The theoretical foundations for academic work on P-E fit can be traced back to Lewin's field theory [Edwards, 2008]. It postulates that behavior is a function of a person and environment, such that neither personal nor environmental characteristics can shape an individual's behavior separately. Instead, these interdependent characteristics jointly drive the behavior of people [Lewin, 1951]. This notion is pervasive in P-E fit research.

In general, P-E fit refers to the congruence, match, or similarity between the person and the environment he or she functions in. These terms denote the proximity of the person and the environment [Edwards, 2008]. One can distinguish between supplementary and complementary P-E fit. The former exists when the person possesses characteristics similar to others in the environment, and the latter when the person's characteristics fill a gap in the environment or vice versa [Muchinsky, Monahan, 1987, as cited in Kristof, 1996]. Complementary fit has been further distinguished according to whether the needs come from the person or from the environment. The degree to which the needs of the individual are fulfilled by rewards in the environment, is called the need-supply fit; the degree to which the needs of the environment are fulfilled by the capabilities of the individual is called the demand-ability fit [Edwards, 2008].

The author focuses on the need-supply fit, which was found to have the greatest impact on employees' attitudes and behaviors [Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, Johnson, 2005; Schmidt, Chapman, Jones, 2015]. The theoretical rationale for links between the need-supply fit and work-related attitudinal outcomes is explained by social exchange theory, which posits that relationships between employees and their employing organization evolve over time into mutual commitments provided that the parties follow certain rules of exchange [Cropanzano, Mitchell, 2005]. Employees who receive economic and socio-emotional resources in the workplace become satisfied with their work and tend

to feel obligated to help the organization that has benefited them. One possible way for individuals to repay their employer is through devoting cognitive, emotional, and physical resources in the performance of one's work roles [Saks, 2006]. In other words, when the organization offers desirable, tangible and intangible rewards, it may be viewed as signaling the intent to make long-term investment in human capital and, which encourages employees to reciprocate by showing positive job attitudes. When the organization fails to fulfill employee needs, those employees are more likely to experience dissatisfaction, and consequently withdraw and disengage themselves from their roles.

P-E fit is generally considered to be a multidimensional concept [Jansen, Kristof-Brown, 2006] that has emerged as a reaction to the difficulties with delineating the idea of fit [Edwards, Billsberry, 2010]. Because capturing all fit forms is problematic, many studies investigated a link between the person and the singular aspect of environment. Scholars explored the fit between employees and their vocations [Feij et al., 1999; Marcus, Wagner, 2015], jobs [Babakus, Yavas, Ashill, 2011; Chen, Yen, Tsai, 2014], teams [Glew, 2012], work groups [Werbel, Johnson, 2001; Seong, Kristof-Brown, 2012], supervisors [Kim, Kim, 2013; Astakhova, 2016], organizations [Piasentin, Chapman, 2007; Choi, Kim, McGinley, 2017], and cultures [Nazir, 2005].

Not only did researchers adopt different conceptualizations of fit, but also investigated numerous fit consequences. In their meta-analyses Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman and Johnson [2005] and Oh et al. [2014] reported that in studies examining P-E fit facets in the post-entry context, the most frequently explored outcomes were job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit. Researchers analyzed also organizational identification, job performance, organizational citizenship behavior, trust in manager, strain, absenteeism, tenure, and actual turnover.

For the purpose of this study two attitudinal outcomes of P-E fit – job satisfaction and work engagement – were analyzed. While job satisfaction has been extensively researched in organizational behavior literature [Spector, 1997], work engagement is a relatively new construct first introduced by Kahn in 1990. There is now a body of evidence indicating that tourism employees' satisfaction and engagement lead directly and indirectly to positive workplace attitudes, intentions, behaviors, and performance both at the individual and the unit levels. Investigations on work satisfaction revealed that it was a strong determinant of organizational commitment [Back, Lee, Abbott, 2011], intent to stay [Kim, Jogaratnam, 2010], withdrawal and counterproductive behaviors [Tuna et al., 2016], in-role and extra-role behaviors [Lee et al., 2006], job performance [Ng, Sambasivan, Zubaidah, 2011], and service quality [Gazzoli, Hancer, Park, 2009]. Studies on work engagement found that it was related to organizational commitment [Karatepe et al., 2014], intention to turnover [Shuck, Reio, Rocco, 2011], innovative behavior [Slåtten, Mehmetoglu, 2011], creativity [Grobelsna, 2014], service performance [Yeh, 2012], customer satisfaction with service encounter [Bednarska, Małkowska, 2014], and customer loyalty [Salanova, Agut, Peiró, 2005].

P-E fit and its consequences may be influenced by individual, environmental, and temporal factors [Jansen, Kristof-Brown, 2006], which includes generational cohort. The premise behind is that individuals of a similar age participate in common social, economic, political or cultural events in the formative phases of their lives. Those shared experiences impact their development of values, including work values [Parry, Urwin, 2011]. Differences in values are manifested in different expectations, aspirations, attitudes, and behaviors in the workplace.

From the three generational cohorts that account for the vast majority of the current workforce (i.e. Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y), the most recent group that entered the labor market – Generation Y – has been given particular attention. Previous studies have identified positive characteristics of Millennial employees, such as the ability to work on parallel tasks, a high level of technological savvy, and openness to constant change. On the other hand, researchers have concluded that members of Generation Y demonstrate a relatively low level of work centrality, as they place greater emphasis on creating a better work-life balance and consider their job as mainly a way to financially support their lifestyle [Barron, Leask, Fyall, 2014; Cairncross, Buultjens, 2010; Park, Gursoy, 2012]. Consequently, they are less likely to allocate personal resources and energy to work tasks, or to experience satisfaction in the workplace.

As noted by Westerman and Yamamura [2007], current generational research suggests that a differential sensitivity to P-E fit between the generations is likely to exist. Although all generations assess the extent their needs are rewarded in the work environment, different work values will likely cause different responses to subjective fit. Specifically, work environment preferences and perceptions are salient and meaningful to younger employees who tend to involve themselves more often in short-term contracts with their employers [Lyons, Schweitzer, Ng, 2015]. Thus, if Generation Y's needs are not fulfilled in the workplace, their impatience<sup>2</sup> will manifest in higher levels of dissatisfaction and disengagement. From this, the following hypothesis was developed: positive relationships between P-E fit and (a) job satisfaction and (b) work engagement are moderated by generational differences in such a way that these relationships are stronger for Generation Y employees.

## Research Method

To test proposed hypothesis, an empirical investigation was undertaken. The target population comprised employed and self-employed workers in Poland's tourism industry. In line with the internationally recommended methodology for tourism satellite account provided by World Tourism Organization [2010], research was conducted among employees in the following establishments in which tourism characteristic activities are carried out: accommodation, food- and beverage-serving activities, passenger transport, tour operation

and travel agencies, recreation and cultural activities. The sampling procedure consisted of two steps. First, all districts (counties) in Poland were divided into three strata based on tourism function development index and 5 districts (4 rural and 1 municipal) were randomly selected from each stratum. Using a quota technique, employees in selected sectors were then contacted and encouraged to participate in the survey. In total, 520 businesses were approached, and 370 agreed to take part in the study. A self-administered paper-based questionnaire was distributed to 1668 employees either in person or by e-mail, yielding 1125 respondents within an 8-month period. After a thorough review of the returned questionnaires, 981 were deemed complete and suitable for the purpose of the present study, representing a 58.8% usable response rate.

The actual start and end dates used to define each generation vary widely [Costanza et al., 2012; Parry, Urwin, 2011]. In this study, Czapiński's [2012] proposition has been adopted and the following birth years were utilized to categorize the subjects: Generation Y 1981–1995, Generation X 1965–1980, and Baby Boomers 1946–1964. Generation Y represented the majority of the sample (68.5%), with Generation X and Baby Boomers constituting 21.0% and 10.5%, respectively. Since there were no significant differences between Generation X and Baby Boomers (considering all variables, as confirmed by the independent samples t-test), the two groups were combined for the purpose of further analysis and hypothesis testing.

Table 1 depicts the sample breakdown by gender, organizational tenure, position held, employment contract, work arrangement, prior experience, and tourism industry sector. The sample was dominated by females. More than a half of the respondents reported that they had been working in their current organization less than three years. Surveyed employees held mostly non-managerial positions; their work arrangements were primarily fixed term and full-time. Moreover, the highest percentage of participants were employed in food service establishments, and most had gained work experience in different sectors.

**TABLE 1. Respondent profile**

Variable	Category	Gen Y N=672	Non-Gen Y N=309	Total N=981
Gender	Female	63.3%	63.3%	63.3%
	Male	36.7%	36.7%	36.7%
Organizational tenure	Less than 1 year	37.1%	6.8%	27.6%
	1–2 years	34.7%	12.4%	27.7%
	3–4 years	16.1%	11.3%	14.6%
	5–9 years	10.4%	25.7%	15.2%
	10 years and more	1.7%	43.8%	14.9%
Position	Managerial	9.7%	26.2%	14.8%
	Non-managerial	90.3%	73.7%	85.2%



Variable	Category	Gen Y N=672	Non-Gen Y N=309	Total N=981
Employment contract	Self-employment	6.0%	18.2%	9.9%
	Indefinite contract	24.5%	52.3%	33.3%
	Fixed term contract	64.3%	27.2%	52.4%
	Other	5.2%	2.3%	4.3%
Work arrangement	Full-time	64.0%	88.2%	71.8%
	Part-time	36.0%	11.8%	28.2%
Prior work experience	In the same sector only	26.1%	22.2%	24.9%
	In different sector(s)	52.3%	67.3%	57.1%
	None	21.6%	10.4%	18.1%
Sector	Accommodation	31.4%	36.9%	33.1%
	Food service activities	43.3%	18.4%	35.5%
	Passenger transport	7.0%	19.1%	10.8%
	Tour operation and travel agencies	7.4%	9.4%	8.1%
	Recreation and cultural activities	10.9%	16.2%	12.5%

Source: own elaboration.

The questionnaire was developed based on a review of previous investigations on complementary P-E fit and its consequences. It consisted of three sections. Section one sought information about preferred and perceived attributes of job and organization. Respondents were asked to imagine an employer they wanted to work for and evaluate 27 work-related characteristics based on their expectations. Afterwards, they were asked to assess the analyzed items regarding current employers. The data enabled the evaluation of the subjective need-supply fit at the individual level by measuring differences between perception and expectation of desired attributes and between expectation and perception of undesired attributes [Bednarska, Olszewski, 2013]. A positive number denotes exceeded expectations, and a negative number denotes unmet expectations.

Section two of the questionnaire dealt with two outcomes of P-E fit – job satisfaction and work engagement. Job satisfaction was assessed using a single-item measure (“On the whole, I am satisfied with my current job”). Work engagement was evaluated with a three-item scale reflecting physical, cognitive, and emotional components of the construct (“At work, I always exert my full effort to perform my job properly”, “My mind is always fully concentrated on performing my job”, and “I am always enthusiastic about performing my work tasks”).

In the final section of the questionnaire demographic data were collected. All variables, except for demographic data, were measured with statements where the respondents marked their level of agreement on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7).

Before distributing the questionnaires to potential respondents, the survey was pre-tested on a group of 25 tourism employees who were asked to complete it and provide



feedback regarding clarity. After analyzing these pilot test data, a few minor modifications in wording and formatting were made.

## Results and Discussion

To confirm the dimensionality of the questionnaire, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted using principal component extraction with varimax rotation. The procedure was based on difference scores measuring the level of P-E fit. Initial analyses indicated that three items should be excluded from further consideration due to low factor loadings or cross-loadings. After scale purification, both the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (0.95) and Bartlett's test of sphericity ( $\chi^2 = 9426.01$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) suggested that factor analysis was appropriate for the data collected. The results of the procedure are reported in Tables 2 and 3.

**TABLE 2. Factor loadings for items**

Items	Factor loadings			
	1.	2.	3.	4.
Good prospects for promotion within the organization	0.788			
Good prospects for long-term professional development	0.770			
Opportunities for enhancing qualifications	0.739			
Attractive fringe benefits	0.723			
High salary	0.667			
Stable employment conditions	0.665			
Available modern equipment to support tasks performance	0.598			
Ability to participate in important decisions	0.588			
Opportunities for acquiring skills for future employment	0.504			
Supportive attitude of colleagues at work		0.846		
Feeling of integration and belonging		0.800		
Competent colleagues at work		0.792		
Friendly atmosphere		0.791		
Respectful behavior experienced in the workplace		0.633		
Matching individual interests			0.754	
Ability to use knowledge and skills gained			0.715	
Challenging work assignments			0.700	
Variety of work activities			0.659	
Feeling a sense of pride			0.595	
Autonomy in determining the way the work is done			0.460	
High social prestige			0.451	
Attractive location				0.759
Working in a variety of locations				0.506
Accessible location				0.475

Source: own elaboration.

**TABLE 3. Summary of exploratory factor analysis**

Factors	Number of items	Eigenvalue	Variance explained	Variance explained (cumulative)	Cronbach's alpha
1. P-O fit	9	5.162	21.51%	21.51%	0.897
2. P-G fit	5	3.782	15.76%	37.27%	0.885
3. P-J fit	7	3.449	14.37%	51.64%	0.843
4. P-L fit	3	1.298	5.41%	57.05%	0.249

Source: own elaboration.

The analysis indicated four factors with eigen values greater than 1.0, which explained 57% of the total variance. The factors were labelled as person-organization (P-O) fit, person-group (P-G) fit, person-job (P-J) fit, and person-location (P-L) fit. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to evaluate the internal consistency of the constructs derived. As the reliability coefficient for P-L fit was much lower than the generally accepted minimum level of 0.7 [Nunnally, Bernstein, 1994], that factor was excluded from further analysis. For the remaining three factors scores were computed by averaging the items that constituted the relevant dimension.

**TABLE 4. Variable descriptive statistics and correlations**

Variables	M	SD	Correlations								
			1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Gender	1.367	0.482									
2. Position	1.852	0.356	-0.005								
3. Work arrangement	1.282	0.450	-0.077*	0.215**							
4. Organizational tenure	4.942	6.903	0.070*	-0.232**	-0.262**						
5. Generation	1.685	0.465	-0.000	0.216**	0.251**	-0.589**					
6. P-O fit	-2.415	1.447	0.074*	-0.189**	-0.223**	0.185**	-0.109**				
7. P-G fit	-1.321	1.287	-0.001	-0.094**	-0.043	0.025	-0.042	0.559**			
8. P-J fit	-1.746	1.285	0.044	-0.229**	-0.276**	0.222**	-0.209**	0.705**	0.485**		
9. Job satisfaction	5.250	1.441	-0.010	-0.166**	-0.194**	0.120**	-0.132**	0.511**	0.533**	0.593**	
10. Work engagement	5.965	0.940	-0.048	-0.116**	-0.147**	0.140**	-0.137**	0.302**	0.298**	0.435**	0.505**

Gender: 1=female, 2=male; position: 1=managerial, 2=non-managerial; work arrangement: 1=full-time, 2=part-time; generation: 1=non-Gen Y, 2=Gen Y

Significant at \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

Source: own elaboration.

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables of interest are provided in Table 4. Overall, tourism employees' fit with organizations was rated the lowest, followed by fit with jobs and with groups. There were significant positive relationships between both job satisfaction and work engagement and all fit facets under investigation, with P-J fit demonstrating the highest correlation coefficients. Furthermore, P-E fit dimensions were positively intercorrelated. Moreover, work attitudes under investigation were related to all socio-economic variables except for gender.

To identify significant differences in perceptions and attitudes of Generation Y and non-Generation Y employees, independent-samples t-tests were used. The results are presented in Table 5. The differences were statistically significant for each construct under study, excepting P-G fit perception. Millennials reported higher discrepancies for fit facets and lower scores for work attitudes than their colleagues, with P-J fit displaying the greatest mean difference. It should be noted, however, that the subsamples differed with respect to organizational tenure, position held, employment contract, work arrangement, and tourism industry sector. These differences may partially explain the variance in work perceptions and attitudes.

**TABLE 5. Variable means: Gen Y vs. non-Gen Y**

Variables	Gen Y	Non-Gen Y	Mean Difference
1. P-O fit	-2.52	-2.18	-0.34**
2. P-G fit	-1.36	-1.24	-0.12
3. P-J fit	-1.93	-1.35	-0.58**
4. Job satisfaction	5.12	5.53	-0.41**
5. Work engagement	5.85	6.21	-0.36**

Significant at \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

Source: own elaboration.

Following Aiken and West's [1991] recommendations to test the research hypothesis about the moderating role of generational differences in the relationship between P-E fit and work attitudes, hierarchical regression analyses were performed. Specifically, job satisfaction and work engagement were regressed separately on P-O, P-G, and P-J fit. In both cases, socio-economic variables entered the first step of the analysis to control potentially confounding effects of gender, position held, work arrangement, and organizational tenure. In the second step, P-E fit dimensions and generation were added. Independent variables were mean centered to address multicollinearity among product scores and their components. Finally, three two-way interaction terms were included in the third step of the analysis.

Table 6 provides an overview of the results for the tested models. Both were significant and, in the final step, independent variables accounted for 45% and 25% of the variance in job satisfaction and work engagement, respectively. Analysis of main effects (step 2) in both models shows that P-G and P-J fit were significantly and positively related to outcome variables, the latter having the greater impact on work attitudes under study. P-O fit, however, was linked to neither job satisfaction nor work engagement. The incremental variance explained by the interaction terms (step 3) reached statistical significance for both dependent variables. Whereas interactive effect of generation with P-G fit proved to be significant, the other two had no impact on employee attitudes. Accordingly, the research hypothesis was partially supported by data.

**TABLE 6. Results of hierarchical regression analyses**

Variables	Model 1 Job satisfaction			Model 2 Work engagement		
	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Step 1 – control variables						
Gender	-0.012	-0.027	-0.036	-0.078*	-0.084**	-0.091**
Position	-0.117**	-0.019	-0.024	-0.056	0.019	0.007
Work arrangement	-0.179**	-0.071*	-0.071*	-0.130**	-0.035	-0.022
Organizational tenure	0.037	-0.029	-0.038	0.096**	0.003	0.005
Step 2 – main effects						
P-O fit		0.060	0.072		-0.086	-0.086
P-G fit		0.332**	0.288**		0.167**	0.132**
P-J fit		0.369**	0.383**		0.421**	0.413**
Generation		-0.029	-0.028		-0.091*	-0.095*
Step 3 – interactive effects						
P-O fit x generation			-0.014			0.033
P-G fit x generation			0.100**			0.086*
P-J fit x generation			-0.029			0.016
R <sup>2</sup>	0.061	0.450	0.455	0.044	0.248	0.260
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.057	0.444	0.448	0.040	0.241	0.250
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		0.388**	0.006*		0.204**	0.012**
F	13.332**	82.814**	61.414**	9.450**	33.473**	25.837**

Reference categories: gender – female, position – managerial, work arrangement – full-time, generation – non-Gen Y

Standardized beta coefficients are provided

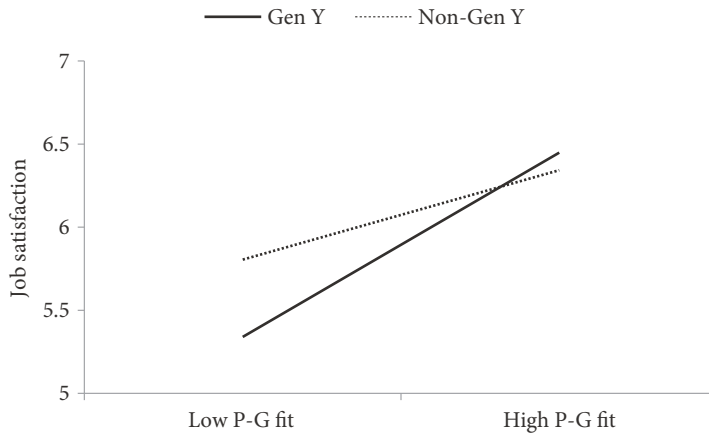
Significant at \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01

Source: own elaboration.

To examine the nature of the interactions, simple slopes were analyzed by plotting the predicted values of work attitudes as functions of P-G fit and the two generational groups. As shown in Figure 1, the relationship between P-G fit and job satisfaction was positive for both Generation Y and non-Generation Y respondents. In line with expectations, the

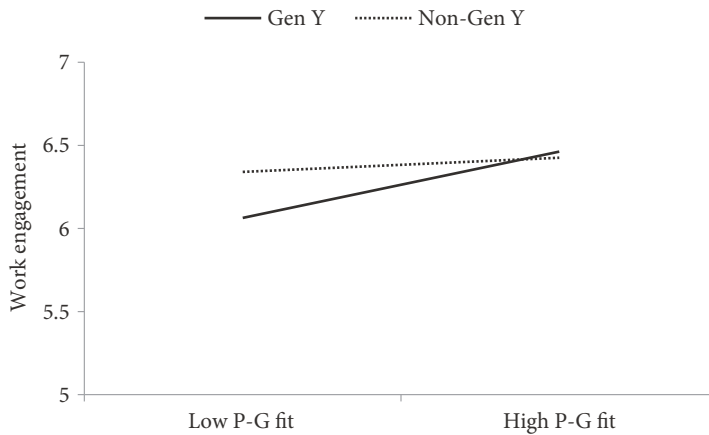
stronger effect was found for younger employees ( $\beta = 0.38$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , for Gen Y;  $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , for non-Gen Y). As can be seen in Figure 2, the relationship between P-G fit and work engagement was positive only for Generation Y representatives, and neutral for their older colleagues ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , for Gen Y;  $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $p > 0.1$ , for non-Gen Y), which is consistent with the research hypothesis.

**FIGURE 1. Interaction effects of generation and P-G fit (job satisfaction)**



Source: own elaboration.

**FIGURE 2. Interaction effects of generation and P-G fit (work engagement)**



Source: own elaboration.

The research attempted to determine whether generational differences moderated links between subjective P-E fit and work-related attitudes in the tourism industry. The hypothesis stating that P-E fit has a stronger positive impact on job satisfaction and work engagement among Generation Y employees was partially supported. First, as expected, P-G and P-J fit were significantly and positively related to outcome variables. Contrary to expectations, however, P-O fit was associated neither with job satisfaction nor with work engagement. Second, only one interaction, between generation and P-G fit, was found to be significantly related to work attitudes of interest. The interaction terms for the other fit dimensions, i.e. P-O and P-J fit, failed to reach significance.

The finding that P-G and P-J fits were positively associated with tourism employees' attitudes echoes previous research on post-entry attitudes and intentions resulting from the match between individuals and work environments. In line with this research, Iplik, Kilic and Yalcin [2011] observed that P-J fit was positively related to the organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job motivation of Turkish hotel managers. Chen, Yen and Tsai [2014] found that P-J fit partially mediated the positive relationship between job crafting and the job engagement of frontline hotel employees in Taiwan. Furthermore, in their study of restaurant chain employees in the US, Vogel and Feldman [2009] reported that P-G fit moderated the positive relationships between P-J fit and job satisfaction, in-role and extra-role performance.

Unexpectedly, the results showed a weak explanatory capacity of P-O fit. A possible explanation is that unmet expectations regarding ideal work environment are not automatically translated into a violation of psychological contract<sup>3</sup> regarding the current employment relationship. It is plausible that specific expectations about employer encouragement, as well as employees' reactions to an organization's failure to meet their needs, are affected by contextual influences [De Hauw, De Vos, 2010]. Tourism employees might realize that tourism organizations – being predominantly micro and small-sized businesses – have limited resources to offer extrinsic rewards. If an insufficient supply of these rewards is therefore not perceived as a broken promise or unfulfilled obligation, then it may have a relatively small effect on work attitudes compared to intrinsic rewards. Future research is needed to investigate this issue.

Although some researchers suggested that Generation Y employees, being constantly connected to social networks, are more likely to fulfill social needs outside the workplace [Lub et al., 2016], this study showed that P-G fit was a stronger predictor of work attitudes for younger respondents. This finding bears some resemblance to research conducted by Wong et al. [2008] and by Lamm and Meeks [2009]. The former surveyed managers and professionals in Australian organizations and reported that Millennials were strongly motivated by being in a cooperative and affiliative workplace compared to other generational cohorts. The latter examined US employees, finding that Millennials showed stronger positive association between workplace fun and job satisfaction than did their co-workers. Furthermore, in their study among managers and supervisors in the US hospitality

industry, Chen and Choi [2008] found that Generation Y viewed the value of supervisory relationships and associates much higher than did older generations.

No intergenerational differences were observed for the effects of P-O and P-J fit on employee attitudes. This is somewhat surprising, given that members of Generation Y are portrayed in the literature as looking for opportunities for personal growth and development and thriving on challenging and stimulating work tasks [Eisner 2005; Martin, 2005]. In line with Costanza et al. [2012] and Parry and Urwin [2011], this may suggest that differences in today's workplaces attributable to generation membership are not as significant and meaningful as advocated in the media.

## Conclusion

This paper contributes to the debate regarding generational differences in the workplace. Although previous research indicates that marked differences among generations exist in career-related values and attitudes [e.g. Cennamo, Gardner, 2008; Cogin, 2012; Lester et al., 2012; Solnet, Kralj, Kandampully, 2012], an unexamined question about whether generation membership affects the links between fit with work environment and individual outcomes remained unanswered.

This study addressed that gap, and given results have practical and research implications. The paper clearly describes empirical evidence of generational differences in perceptions and attitudes of tourism employees. These findings support the notion that different generations may respond differently to the subjectively assessed match between the individual and the work environment. At the same time the analysis demonstrates that some aspects of P-E fit are equally important to all generations.

Some scholars argue that to fully utilize current employees and attract qualified applicants, it is essential for employers to recognize the specific needs that all cohorts of employees bring to work [Barron, Leask, Fyall, 2014; Cogin, 2012]. Moreover, by understanding the differences and similarities between generational groups, managers can develop human resources practices that aid communication, improve employee satisfaction and engagement, and increase organizational performance [Cennamo, Gardner, 2008]. This study reveals that the fit between the individual and the tasks that are performed at work is the strongest predictor of job satisfaction and work engagement. What's more, P-J fit has equally strong predictive power for all generations of tourism workers. Consequently, to enhance desirable employee attitudes, tourism organizations should provide them with interesting and challenging tasks that will allow to use knowledge and skills gained. Managers should also consider orchestrating jobs so that they are enriched, with an emphasis on creating a variety of work activities and assuring autonomy in determining the way the work is done. The results also show that when managing a younger generation of employees more emphasis should be placed on their affiliative needs, as they seem to be more motivated by



a good working atmosphere. In other words, tourism employers should promote a culture that prioritizes open, positive social relationships among employees. In particular, they should foster team-building initiatives, encourage supportive and respectful attitudes among work colleagues, and create a trustful and friendly atmosphere. Finally, the study found support for both differences and similarities between generational groups. Tourism organizations therefore need to be careful in adopting stereotypical approaches to managing generations in today's workplaces.

Despite its contributions, the present study includes some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. Owing to the cross-sectional design, it is impossible to unambiguously determine whether observed dissimilarities between groups were attributable to genuine generational differences or age (maturation) effects. Those participants of the research who were born earlier not only belong to a different generation, but are also at a different life stage and moment in their careers with all the consequences that may come from already possessed experience [Cennamo, Gardner, 2008; Parry, Urwin, 2011]. To separate the effects of generation, longitudinal research is required. Moreover, although the hypothesized relationships were based on logical grounds and on previous research, the cross-sectional nature of data limits the conclusions one can make about causality.

Another issue to consider is that the presented findings are based on single-source self-reported data. Hence, there is a possibility of a common method bias, including social desirability and response consistency effects. Collecting data from a single source also resulted in the subjective assessment of fit. At the same time, it is argued that the subjective perception of match is particularly relevant in the context of attitudinal work outcomes, because employees can respond to misfit only when they are aware that such misfit exists [Cable, Edwards, 2004]. Still, since self-reports may have inflated the observed relationships between P-E fit and its consequences, more objective measures should be used in future research.

Finally, a potential weakness of this study arises from the unique characteristics of the population. The survey was carried out among Poland's tourism employees. Therefore, generalizations to other sectors and countries should be employed guardedly. However, tourism organizations do provide a useful environment for investigating high-contact services, and the described relationships may therefore provide added value to the literature on human resources in service industries.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Author's email address: m.bednarska@ue.poznan.pl
- <sup>2</sup> Millennials are considered to have an "I want it all and I want it now" mentality [Ng, Schweitzer, Lyons, 2010].
- <sup>3</sup> The psychological contract concerns beliefs of individuals about the exchange of mutual obligations between the employee and the employer; this means that the employee perceives contributions he or she makes obligate the employer to reciprocity, or vice versa [Rousseau, 1989].

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