

# **Generational conflict and its impact of work behavior and attitudes**

(empirical paper)

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## **Abstract:**

Building commitment and preventing costly turnover are key challenges facing organizations today. This paper examines whether the fulfilled elements of the employment relationship that predict commitment and willingness to change companies vary significantly with age. Using a sample of 270 employees working in retail stores, it was found that in comparison to those under 30, fulfilling the need for a pleasant environment is more strongly related to the commitment of more senior workers. Providing for career advancement opportunities enhances the desire of younger employees to remain with their companies. In contrast, employees aged 45 and over are more willing to remain with the organization when employers provide for adequate resources and support. Providing employability development opportunities enhances commitment and reduces the willingness to quit and neglectful behavior for employees as a whole.

**Keywords:** generational conflict, psychological contract, human resource management

## **Generational conflict and its impact on work behavior and attitudes**

*«Ours is now an age-conscious nation in which perceptions of a widening generation gap and even outright generational conflict prevails (McManus, 1997, p. 111).*

Achieving high commitment and retaining technical workers is a key challenge facing firms (Davenport, 1999; Cavanaugh and Noe, 1999). However, determining which components of the employment relationship can make a difference in enhancing commitment and reducing turnover may be difficult. Young people in today's workforce are often portrayed as wanting very different things from work than their more senior counterparts (Finegold *et al.* 2002; Conger, 1998). There has been little theoretical or empirical work to discover if age has a moderating effect between different elements of the employment relationship and employees' commitment or willingness to change companies (Finegold *et al.* 2002). This study offers a conceptual framework using the psychological contract theory to explain if age may affect employment preferences and then tests for age effects.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **Using the psychological contract to explain differences across age groups**

Meeting individuals' work preferences is more likely to have a positive impact on job behavior and attitudes (Rousseau, 1995; Guest, 1998). Age is one factor that may shape differences in what people want from work and how attached they are to their organization (Finegold *et al.*, 2002).

This study uses the psychological contract as a framework for understanding different attitudes across age groups. The psychological contract has been viewed as an explanatory framework for understanding the employment relationship and how that relationship is affected by structural organizational changes such as downsizing (Cavanaugh and Noe, 1999; Capelli, 1999). It has been defined as “an individual's beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organizations” (Rousseau, 1995, p.9). The “beliefs” refer to employee perceptions of the explicit and implicit promises (Robinson, Kraatz, and Rousseau, 1994) regarding the exchange of employee contributions (e.g., effort, ability, loyalty) for organizational inducements (e.g., pay, promotion, security). The psychological contract offers an explanatory framework for understanding employee attitudes and behavior (e.g., Rousseau, 1989; Schein, 1980). It has been used in a number of ways to better understand the employment relationship (e.g., its contents and how it is negotiated), but the key construct within psychological contract theory in terms of its relationship with outcomes is psychological contract fulfillment or breach. Psychological

contract fulfillment has been found to associate positively with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors and performance and to associate negatively with the intention to quit (Robinson, 1996; Robinson and Morrison, 1995, 2000; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Turnley and Feldman, 1999, 2000). As such, the psychological contract seems like a very plausible approach to understanding attitudes and behaviors across different age groups.

### **Age effects on the employment relationship**

There are a number of reasons for supposing that younger employees may have a different psychological contract from that of their older counterparts. O'Bannon (2001) argues that as each new generation enters the workforce, conflicts are assumed, as each generation sets its tone and establishes boundaries, ground rules, and expectations. Perhaps no generation has entered the workforce with as much skepticism and diminished expectations regarding work-life as the generation referred to as "X." Prophetically, there have been substantive misunderstandings between Baby-Boomers, who were born roughly between the years 1946-1964, and Generation Xers who were born roughly between 1961-1981 (Foot, 1996). O'Bannon (2001) states that in order to remain productive, the great majority of Baby-Boomers who supervise the nation's new generation must understand their needs and be willing to compromise their expectations regarding this generation's work ethic and their way of balancing issues affecting work and life.

Finegold *et al.* (2002) have stated that understanding what factors are likely to be most strongly related to commitment and turnover for different age groups requires disentangling three constructs that are combined in a person's 'age': life stage effects, career stage effects, and cohort effects. They argue that research on adult development has found that as individuals age, they pass through different development stages that affect their employment priorities (Erikson, 1963; Veiga, 1983). These changes, while happening throughout life, tend to manifest themselves in certain key transitions (e.g. initial entry into the working world), rather than as a smooth progression (Levinson *et al.*, 1978).

The proposition that younger and older workers may view work and self in fundamentally different ways is not new. Life-career-stage models (Hall, 1996; Levinson *et al.*, 1978) suggest that the early years (20-34) are years of establishment and settling down; later years (35-50) are associated with a stronger sense of self and location toward life and work. Kegan's (1982) work with different stages of adult development suggested different interpersonal orientations for younger and older adults. Older adults tend to operate in terms of internal standards of meeting mutual and moral obligations; by contrast, younger adults tend to coordinate their needs with those of other individuals in a more transactional manner (Kanungo and Conger, 1993). Empirical evidence also may suggest that older workers tend to have lower needs for achievement and higher needs for affiliation than do younger workers (Doering *et al.*, 1983; Wagner and Rush, 2000)

Individuals in different birth cohorts form their professional identities and employment preferences under different economic and social conditions (Evetts, 1992). Individuals born in a larger cohort face greater competition for jobs when they enter the labor market, which has potentially adverse impacts on their longer term earnings and career prospects (Freeman, 1976). These economic realities in turn may shape individuals' subsequent expectations regarding the workplace. The wider societal and cultural context in which individuals of a similar age are raised can also influence their work preferences by shaping generational values.

### **Affective commitment, willingness to quit and neglect**

To educe the desired outcomes, firms must focus on creating employment relationships that gain commitment and retain workers. Our study focuses on affective commitment, the facet of commitment most likely to be influenced by changes in what firms offer their employees (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Affective commitment has been defined 'in terms of the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization' that is 'characterized by at least three factors: (a) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (c) a definite desire to maintain organizational membership' (Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian, 1974; p. 604). Affective commitment has been found to relate to member contribution to the organization and to performance outcomes that are within the control of employees (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Some leading theorists on commitment (Mowday, Porter, and Steers, 1982) indicate that the antecedents of commitment are likely to change as individuals grow older and their priorities shift.

Willingness to change companies refers to thinking of voluntarily leaving an organization by searching for a different job or thinking about quitting. Willingness to change companies is related to affective commitment (Clugston, 2000), but the two constructs are conceptually distinct. A large body of empirical research shows that individual attitudes, such as turnover intent, are strong predictors of actual departure from the organization (e.g. Bluedorn, 1982; Steers and Mowday, 1981).

Rusbult *et al.* (1988) outlined and tested a new theory intended to serve as an integrative model of responses to job dissatisfaction. They have argued that job dissatisfaction can also be related to destructive behavior such as neglect. Neglectful behavior is associated with a tendency for lateness, increased error rate and absence (Coyle-Shapire and Kessler, 2000).

In summary, there are reasons for supposing that younger employees may hold a different psychological contract from that of older employees in terms of psychological contract fulfillment and this may explain differences found in attitudes and behaviors across age groups.

## Hypotheses

Using the psychological contract literature, we developed hypotheses regarding how age may moderate the perception of unfulfilled promises of specific components of the employment relationship to affective commitment, willingness to quit and neglect.

**Employability development.** Skill development is likely to be important for employees of all ages, as they recognize that their value in the labor market depends on their capacity to keep up with new technology and shifting skill requirements (Hall and Mirvis, 1996). Given today's flatter organizational structures, reduced employment security, and greater labor mobility, a new form of career has been argued to be evolving that is not characterized by steady progression within one company. It is instead presented as a sequence of moves that are likely to span multiple firms and work roles, and may entail restarting careers at different life stages (Hall and Mirvis, 1996). Most notably, skill development is likely to be more salient to people at all life stages, not just when entering the workforce, as individuals need to ensure their competencies do not become obsolete in the face of rapid changes in knowledge and new organizational demands.

However, there are reasons to believe that skill development may continue to be most strongly related to the commitment and retention of young workers (Sparrow, 2000; Capelli, 1999). Individuals who have just entered the workplace have the greatest need for development, as they seek to identify and build competencies. The lack of job security is more likely to reinforce the greater importance that today's young people place on development as a means for ensuring their employability (Colquitt, LePine, and Noe, 2000; Finegold *et al.*, 2002).

*Hypothesis 1: Fulfilling employees needs for employability development will have a stronger positive relationship with commitment and a stronger negative relationship with willingness to quit and neglect for the younger employees than for the older age group.*

**Career advancement.** Younger employees are working to develop mastery of relevant skills and generally do not have the experience to obtain higher positions, so whether the employer have satisfied their career advancement expectations is likely to be less important to them. Individuals at the most senior career stage have been found to have both lower aspirations for advancement and sometimes greater expectations for promotion opportunities in recognition of their experience (Raelin, 1985; Veiga, 1983; Saba and Guerin, 2004). On the other hand, the tight labor market when under-30s entered the labor market may have elevated expectations for rapid career advancement (Finegold *et al.*, 2002).

*Hypothesis 2: Fulfilled promises related to career advancement will have a stronger positive relationship with commitment and a stronger negative relationship with willingness to change companies for the younger employees than for the senior age group.*

**Work-life balance.** As competitive pressures on organizations and time demands on employees increase, there appears to be a growing demand for greater balance between work and the other aspects of life (Rapoport and Bailyn, 1998). Individuals who perceive their companies to offer employees greater support for balancing family and work life

issues, through policies like flextime and telecommuting, report significantly higher levels of organizational commitment (Scandura and Lankau, 1997). While support for work-life balance is potentially important to all employees, life-stage models, as examined by Finegold *et al.*, 2002) suggest that the salience of this issue for retaining and securing commitment of employees will vary with individuals' ages. Studies have found that people in mid-life have the most work-balance issues to deal with, as they struggle to balance a strong desire for career advancement with major family responsibilities (Wolfe and Kolb, 1980). More senior employees may have parents in declining health who require care. Those in the maintenance stage of their own career may also be interested in scaling back on work in order to enjoy other aspects of life (Hall and Mirvis, 1996). Early career employees, in contrast, generally have the fewest responsibilities outside work and have been found to place the greatest focus on career over non-work issues (Jans, 1989).

*Hypothesis 3: Fulfilled promises related to work-life balance will have a stronger positive impact on commitment and a stronger negative impact on willingness to quit and neglect for the older age group than for the younger one.*

**Involvement in decision making.** If employees perceive their jobs to be important to the functioning of their workgroups and that they have authority to make key decisions, employees may use this information to make sense of their psychological contract dealing with meaningful and engaging work. In many organizations, changes inspired by a shift toward organizing work in order to improve quality and instill innovation, including use of self-managed teams (Hackman, 1987), must be faced by diverse groups of employees, particularly regarding length of service, age and career stage. Frequently, older workers, particularly those long established in their careers, must meet new demands, different responsibilities and a level of autonomy that may be alien to their previous experience. Kidwell (2003) argues that as demographics change, tension across generations that has been seen in the political realm may manifest itself in the workplace (Kidwell, 2003). O'Bannon (2001) states that a review of Xers finds their top work complaints include (a) management that ignores ideas from employees, (b) lack of consistent feedback or recognition when it's due, and (c) "do-it because I said so" management.

*Hypothesis 4: Fulfilling promises related to involvement in decision-making will have a stronger positive relationship with commitment and a stronger negative relationship with willingness to quit and neglect for the younger age group than for the older one.*

**Resources and support.** The worker who perceives organizational support assumes that the organization will offer assistance during hard times as well as sufficient resources to accomplish an effective job and conquer stressful periods (Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe, 2003). The meta-analysis of Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) describes three psychological processes derived from the positive effects of perceived organizational support. First, an employee who receives organizational support will feel the need to return the favour by helping the employer achieve his objectives and goals. Second, the worker will feel accepted and respected due to perceived organizational support, hence his socio-emotional needs will be met and in return he will identify more

strongly to the organization. Third, an employee who perceives organizational support will recognize that good performance at work is appreciated and rewarded by the employer. Older workers are said to lack the energy of their younger counterparts, they are believed to be more resistant to change. Organizations bent on downsizing and restructuring offer older workers incentives to retire early as they are also perceived, often incorrectly, as blocking career growth of young employees, lowering productivity and preventing innovation (Stein *et al.*, 2000). They are believed to be more dependent on resources and support as they are the ones who went through working in the same environment but with reduced resources (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002; Kidwell, 2003). Younger workers have come to rely on their own and to count more on themselves than on the employer's support (O'Bannon, 2001).

*Hypothesis 5: Fulfilling promises to provide resources and support will have a stronger positive relationship with commitment and a stronger negative relationship with willingness to quit and neglect for the older age group than for the younger one.*

**Work climate.** Climate characteristics that are an integral part of one's job (e.g. cooperation among employees and a pleasant working environment) are also considered as important component of the psychological contract. Employees who perceive that their workgroup and social environment had cooperation, sense of pride, and concern for each other also had a psychological contract that involved professionalism at work as well as opportunities to be a valued team/organizational member. Climate characteristics are as important to young workers as they are to their older counterparts. However, O'Bannon (2001) states that social issues heavily influenced employees who began their work careers during the 1960s through the mid-1970s. The values of these individuals are grounded in their perception of the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and the style and class of John F. Kennedy. They were not materialistic but were more motivated by quality of life as opposed to counting possessions."

*Hypothesis 6: Fulfilling promises related to a cooperative working environment will have a stronger positive relationship with commitment and a stronger negative relationship with willingness to change companies for the older age group than for the younger one.*

**Fairness.** Organizational justice describes the individual's and the group's perception of the fairness of treatment received from an organization and their behavioral reaction to such perceptions (James, 1993). Distributive justice describes the perceived fairness of the outcomes employees receive; procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of the means used to determine those outcomes, and interactional justice refers to the quality of interpersonal treatment received at the hands of decision-makers (Bies and Shapiro, 1987; Colquitt *et al.*, 2001; Cropanzano and Greenberg, 1997). Moorman (1991) found that employees who perceived greater levels of justice generally engaged in more organizational citizenship behavior. Thus, the literature suggests that greater levels of perceived justice are generally related to more positive work attitudes and behaviors (Rahim, Magner, and Shapiro, 2000).

Therefore, younger and older workers may differ in their orientations toward self, others, and work. These differences may lead to different salient motives for altruistic OCB among younger and older employees. Wagner and Rush (2000) posited that younger individuals may be influenced by a norm of reciprocity (Kanungo and Conger, 1993) that is transactional and requires a fair exchange in return for assistance and therefore they considered that younger employees' concerns about fairness would be preeminent.

*Hypothesis 7: Fulfillment of fairness in the employment relationship will have a stronger positive relationship with affective commitment and a stronger negative relationship with willingness to quit and neglect for the younger group than for the older age group.*

## **METHODS**

### **Sample and data collection procedures**

The data were collected in 2003 from employees working in three large stores belonging to a Canadian company in retail. We administered 420 anonymous surveys; 271 were returned and had usable responses, yielding a response rate of 64.5 per cent. The surveys were pre-tested and were distributed in the firm's internal mail system with a pre-paid envelope addressed to the researchers.

### **Measures**

Levinson *et al.* (1978) identified two key life stage transitions that men commonly go through once they have begun their careers-around the age of 30 and in their mid-40s-where they tend to re-examine the fit between their goals and actual circumstances and bring about significant career changes if there is not a good fit. We treated age as a categorical variable parceled into two groups-age 30 and under (126 respondents), and 45 and over (51 respondents). A dummy variable (valued at 0 or 1) was created for each age group. This kind of dummy variable coding procedure does not centre the comparisons involving the categorical age variable (Aiken and West, 1991). One group age dummy was omitted from the regression analysis for comparison purposes (Aiken and West, 1991).

There were significant differences across the groups in their employment status. The youngest group had 78.9 per cent of part-time employees, while the older one had 31.4 per cent of part-time employees. No significant differences were found neither in the educational levels or the gender composition of the two age groups. We controlled for these demographic variables in our analyses.

A breach of the psychological contract is defined here as occasions when the organization breaks a promise to the employee. In addition, occasions when the organization goes beyond what it has promised to deliver in a positive sense will also be considered. Previous research has largely neglected the effects of 'over-fulfilled' psychological contracts; where it has been addressed (see Turnley and Feldman, 2000). Breach and over-fulfillment have been considered as opposite ends of a single continuum. The items for the psychological contract content are provided in Table 1. All



of the variables were assessed on a 5-point scale where the anchors were 1 'I have received much less than promised' and 5 'I have received much more than promised' with the middle category being 3 'I have received as much as promised'. We developed the measures by taking into consideration various empirical studies that examined the psychological contract inducements.

Respondents rated fulfillment with their employer's promises on six aspects of their job and their career. Fulfillment of fairness promises was a 6-item scale that measured whether the employer has fulfilled their expectations of being treated fairly and having open and honest communication with the employer. Fulfillment of their ability to be involved in decision-making was measured by a 4-item scale that referred to the fulfillment of their expectations to take initiatives and be able to make a difference.

Realization of career advancement promises was a 4-item scale that measured fulfillment with opportunities the company provided for career growth and for individuals to advance along a managerial path. Involvement in decision making was a 4-item scale that measured fulfillment with the possibilities the company provided to make a difference, to be able to change things and to be involved in decision making.

Fulfillment of work-life balance expectations was a 3-item scale that measured flexibility in work arrangements and workload.

Realization of support and a pleasant working environment were a 4-item and a 3-item scale that measured for the former the fulfillment of expectations related to providing adequate resources and clearly defining work objectives. For the latter, the three items referred to the extent to which the employer was able to fulfill promises related to enhancing cooperation among colleagues and providing pleasant working conditions.

Realization of employability development promises was measured by a 4-item scale referring to the opportunities provided by the employer to provide training that was not only related to the job but could enhance the employees' 'market value'. The scale was developed by De Vos *et al.* (2003).

We selected the 6-item affective commitment scale from Meyer and Allen (1997). We measured willingness to quit with a 4-item scale and neglect with a 4-item scale from Rusbult *et al.*, (1988).

Tables 1 and 2 indicates that all scales achieved reliabilities over 0.70.

## **Controls**

To control for potential differences, we controlled demographic variables -education level, gender, and status -that prior research indicates are related to commitment, turnover intent and neglect. Gender was measured with a dichotomous variable where 1 indicates a female and 2 indicates a male respondent. Employment status was measured with a dichotomous variable where 1 indicates a part-time status and 2 indicates a full time status.

## RESULTS

We conducted a principal-axis factor analysis with a varimax rotation to assess the construct validity of the survey measures (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Exploratory factor analysis of survey items**

Item	Fairness in treatment	Involvement in decision making	Work-life balance	Career advancement	Resources & Support	Pleasant work environment
11. Honest and open communication	<b>0,74</b>	0,13	0,15	-0,02	0,14	0,37
16. Respect	<b>0,68</b>	0,22	0,18	0,11	0,19	0,34
10. Fair treatment	<b>0,67</b>	0,18	0,21	0,29	0,19	0,20
12. Support for personal problems	<b>0,62</b>	0,24	0,26	0,26	0,10	-0,02
13. Organizational help	<b>0,59</b>	0,22	0,30	0,21	0,34	0,24
08. Fair procedures	<b>0,59</b>	0,26	0,12	0,26	0,35	0,05
09. Contribution recognition	0,51	0,22	0,05	0,41	0,29	0,15
04. Developing competencies	0,46	0,29	0,31	0,30	0,03	0,25
17. Stimulating work	0,45	0,37	0,30	0,27	0,02	0,38
30. Being creative	0,30	<b>0,72</b>	0,23	-0,03	0,08	0,29
18. Changing things	0,10	<b>0,72</b>	0,15	0,22	0,28	0,15
27. Making decisions	0,15	<b>0,71</b>	0,13	0,15	0,30	0,16
15. Taking initiatives	0,39	<b>0,67</b>	0,20	0,18	0,05	0,08
07. Frequent feedback	0,32	0,41	-0,13	0,31	0,35	0,03
32. Flexibility in work arrangements	0,38	0,06	<b>0,67</b>	0,09	0,32	0,09
31. Balance work and life	0,27	0,25	<b>0,64</b>	0,18	0,25	0,10
33. Reasonable workload	0,25	0,10	<b>0,63</b>	0,07	0,34	0,27
20. Personal growth opportunities	0,22	0,43	0,54	0,24	0,11	0,29
05. Long term employment	-0,02	0,16	0,53	0,43	0,10	0,11
21. Opportunity to develop new competencies	0,29	0,34	0,51	0,15	0,15	0,42
03. Career advancement opportunities	0,22	0,18	0,11	<b>0,77</b>	-0,01	0,14
14. Rapid promotions	0,14	0,31	0,12	<b>0,75</b>	-0,06	0,05
06. Career development plan	0,00	0,44	0,32	0,62	0,15	0,11
01. Competitive salary	0,37	-0,12	0,05	<b>0,60</b>	0,26	0,11
02. Benefits	0,30	-0,11	0,22	<b>0,42</b>	0,22	-0,01
25. Sufficient resources	0,18	0,20	0,28	0,08	<b>0,78</b>	0,22
26. Adequate equipment	0,18	0,10	0,19	-0,03	<b>0,71</b>	0,30
19. Coherent management	0,22	0,40	0,26	0,18	<b>0,59</b>	0,16
24. Clear objectives	0,25	0,34	0,37	0,14	<b>0,53</b>	0,23
23. Consideration for employees' needs	0,34	0,22	0,28	0,24	0,46	0,35
28. Cooperation from colleagues	0,18	0,09	0,13	0,08	0,20	<b>0,84</b>
29. Pleasant work environmen	0,20	0,25	0,24	0,12	0,18	<b>0,73</b>
22. Competent co-workers	0,20	0,16	0,09	0,11	0,37	<b>0,69</b>
Explained variance	<b>14.32</b>	<b>11.90</b>	<b>10.19</b>	<b>10.14</b>	<b>10.14</b>	<b>9.65</b>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

We retained six factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00. The six factors explained 66.34 per cent of the variance. To avoid conceptual confusion, we dropped items that loaded over than 0.40 on more than one factor.

Table 2 contains means, standard deviations, reliability and correlations. They indicate that we have sufficient variance in our measures and that multicollinearity does not appear to be a problem.

To test our hypotheses, we conducted hierarchical regression analyses (see Tables 3, 4 and 5). In the first step, we regressed each dependant variable against only the control variables. In the second step, we added our main effects along with our age dummies. The group pf employees aged 30 and under were found to be less committed affectively, showed greater intentions to quit and a more neglectful behavior. In the third set of regressions, we entered the interaction terms. The age group interactions together explained a small, but significant, amount of additional variance in commitment ( $\Delta R^2=0.03$ ), willingness to quit ( $\Delta R^2=0.06$ ) and neglect ( $\Delta R^2=0.01$ ). The interaction term is created by multiplying each predictor variable by one of the two included dummy variables. Seven interaction terms were included in the analysis - the seven employment relationship variables interacting with the younger age group - again omitting the oldest age group to serve as the point of comparison (Aiken and West, 1991).

### **Results for hypotheses**

No support was found for Hypothesis 1. Although fulfilling employability development promises was found to be positively related to commitment and negatively associated to the intent to quit an to neglect (step 2), no significant interaction terms were found for any age groups with regard to the relationship between the fulfillment of employability development promises and the three outcome variables., This indicates that the relationships between the realization of employability development aspirations to commitment, intention to quit and neglect were not different across the age groups.

Hypothesis 2 is partially supported. Results demonstrate that the fulfillment of career advancement promises has a stronger negative relationship with the willingness to quit ( $\beta=-0.225\ddagger$ ) and with neglect ( $\beta=-0.117\ddagger$ ) for the youngest group of employees in comparison to the oldest group. No significant interactions are found regarding the relationship between fulfillment of career advancement promises and commitment.

No support was found for Hypothesis 3. No significant interaction terms were found for any age groups with regard to the relationship between fulfillment of work life balance promises and the three outcome variables. There were no age groups differences in the relationships between the realization of work-life balance aspirations, commitment, intent to quit and neglect.

**Table 2. Means, standard deviations, reliability and correlations**

	Mean	Std. Dev.	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1.Age	32.24	13.5														
2.Gender	1.64	0.48		0.06												
3.Education	1.67	0.69		0.10	0.08											
4.Employment status	1.42	0.49		0.43*	0.03	-0.07										
5.Affective commitment	2.99	0.78	0.71	0.37*	0.05	-0.07	0.20†									
6.Intention to quit	2.85	1.10	0.81	-0.23*	0.01	0.22*	-0.11	-0.49*								
7.Neglect	2.10	0.72	0.72	-0.35*	-0.03	-0.07	-0.12‡	-0.44*	0.41*							
8.Fairness	3.02	0.76	0.89	-0.20†	0.10	-0.10	-0.17‡	0.23*	-0.27*	-0.08						
9.Decision making	2.77	0.79	0.86	-0.10	0.13‡	-0.07	-0.10	0.27*	-0.29*	-0.13‡	0.62*					
10.Work-life balance	2.95	0.84	0.84	-0.23*	0.14†	-0.15†	-0.07	0.14†	-0.24*	-0.05	0.64*	0.55*				
11.Career advancement	2.60	0.72	0.75	-0.09	0.00	-0.13‡	-0.05	0.14†	-0.22*	-0.02	0.49*	0.42*	0.45*			
12.Resources and support	2.92	0.74	0.85	-0.20†	0.08	-0.12‡	-0.21	0.16	-0.26*	-0.04	0.66*	0.58*	0.65*	0.35*		
13.Cooperation	3.25	0.83	0.84	-0.28*	0.05	-0.08	-0.25*	0.09	-0.21*	0.01	0.59*	0.52*	0.49*	0.34*	0.61*	
14.Employability development	3.59	0.93	0.83	-0.09	-0.01	-0.11	0.01	0.20†	-0.39*	-0.19*	0.37*	0.38*	0.32*	0.20†	0.36*	0.22*

Gender: F=1; M=2

Employment status: part time=1; full time=2

\*p&lt;0.001, †p&lt;0.01, ‡p&lt;0.1

No support was found for Hypothesis 4. Providing employees with opportunities to make decision was positively related only to commitment. However, contrary to our prediction, there were no age-group differences in the relationships between the fulfillment of that specific component and the three outcome variables.

No support was found for Hypothesis 5. Curiously, the main effects indicate that the fulfillment of support promises was found to be positively and significantly related to neglect ( $\beta=0.189\ddagger$ ) for employees as a whole. Contrary to our prediction, no significant age interactions were found for commitment, intention to quit or neglect.

Hypothesis 6 was partially supported. Fulfilling the promise of providing a pleasant working environment is negatively and more strongly related to the affective commitment of the younger age group ( $\beta=-0,284\ddagger$ ). Therefore, fulfilling this component of the psychological contract is less important to the younger age group than it is to the older one. No significant age interactions were found for the intention to quit and neglect.

Table 3. Regression analyses for the younger generation compared to the older one in predicting organizational affective commitment

	<b>Step one</b>	<b>Step two</b>	<b>Step three</b>
	<b><math>\beta</math></b>		
<b>Controls</b>			
Gender	0.034	0.015	0.009
Education	-0.088	-0.119 ‡	-0.129 †
Status	0.159 †	0.029	0.022
<b>Main effects</b>			
Fairness		0.093	-0.053
Involvement in decision making		0.209 †	0.019
Work-life balance		0.005	0.137
Career advancement		-0.009	0.050
Resources and support		-0.055	-0.172
Pleasant work environment		0.046	0.305
Employability development		0.136 ‡	0.191 ‡
If age 30 and under		-0.370 *	-0.379 *
<b>Interaction effects</b>			
Fairness * age 30 and under			0.181
Decision making * age 30 and under			0.174
WL balance * age 30 and under			-0.162
Career advancement * age 30 and under			-0.070
Resources and support * age 30 and under			0.149
Work env.* age 30 and under			-0.284 †
Employability * age 30 and under			-0.065
<b>F</b>	1.99	4.41 *	2.98 *
<b><math>\Delta R^2</math></b>		0.19	0.03
<b>Total <math>R^2</math></b>	0.04	0.23	0.26

\* $p<0.001$ , † $p<0.01$ , ‡ $p<0.1$

No support was found for Hypothesis 7. The main effects indicate that the fulfillment of fairness promises was found to be negatively and significantly related to neglect ( $\beta = -0,175 \ddagger$ ) for employees as a whole. Contrary to our prediction, no significant age interactions were found for commitment, intention to quit or neglect.

Table 4. Regression analyses for the younger generation compared to the older one in predicting intention to quit

	<u>Step one</u>	<u>Step two</u>	<u>Step three</u>
	<u>B</u>		
<b>Controls</b>			
Gender	-0.040	-0.008	-0.018
Education	0.212 †	0.202 †	0.218 †
Status	-0.049	0.055	0.038
<b>Main effects</b>			
Fairness		0.013	0.079 †
Involvement in decision making		-0.050	0.108
Work-life balance		-0.119	-0.084
Career advancement		-0.062	0.076
Resources and support		0.048	-0.196
Pleasant work environment		-0.103	-0.100
Employability development		-0.353 *	-0.369 †
If age 30 and under		0.292 *	0.318 *
<b>Interaction effects</b>			
Fairness * age 30 and under			-0.036
Decision making * age 30 and under			-0.190
WL balance * age 30 and under			-0.076
Career advancement * age 30 and under			-0.225 †
Resources and support * age 30 and under			0.289 †
Work env. * age 30 and under			-0.045
Employability * age 30 and under			0.014
<b>F</b>	2.76 †	5.76 *	4.37 *
<b><math>\Delta R^2</math></b>		0.23	0.06
<b>Total <math>R^2</math></b>	0.05	0.28	0.34

\*p<0.001, †p<0.01, ‡p<0.1

Table 5. Regression analyses for the younger generation compared to the older one in predicting neglect

	<u>Step one</u>	<u>Step two</u>	<u>Step three</u>
	<u><math>\beta</math></u>		
<b>Controls</b>			
Gender	-0.053	-0.044	-0.039
Education	-0.075	-0.008	0.002 †
Status	-0.082	0.116	0.108
<b>Main effects</b>			
Fairness		-0.175	-0.174 †
Involvement in decision making		-0.111	-0.013
Work-life balance		-0.087	-0.140
Career advancement		0.086	0.172
Resources and support		0.189 ‡	0.207
Pleasant work environment		0.048	-0.056
Employability development		-0.153 †	-0.173
If age 30 and under		0.397 *	0.410 *
<b>Interaction effects</b>			
Fairness * age 30 and under			-0.005
Decision making * age 30 and under			-0.104
WL balance * age 30 and under			0.059
Career advancement * age 30 and under			-0.117
Resources and support * age 30 and under			-0.012
Work env. * age 30 and under			0.100
Employability * age 30 and under			0.035
<b>F</b>	0.93	2.89 †	1.82 ‡
<b><math>\Delta R^2</math></b>		0.14	0.01
<b>Total <math>R^2</math></b>	0.02	0.16	0.17

\*p<0.001, †p<0.01, ‡p<0.1

## Discussion

Our findings indicate that there are some statistically significant differences across age groups in the factors that are related to affective commitment, willingness to quit and neglect. However, we find that the size of these age effects is quite small. These findings agree with Finegold *et al.* 2002 conclusions from a larger scale study on technical and professional workers.

The pattern of results indicates some support for our conceptual framework: the use of the psychological contract framework, along with generational effects to understand differences and similarities in examining attitudes behaviors for different age groups.

Our findings reflect after having controlled for employment status, gender and educational level, that employees aged 30 years and less are less affectively committed to the organization. They are more willing to leave and more neglectful than their older counterparts.

Our results also show that individuals of all ages are more committed to their firm if they feel the employer has satisfied his promises related mainly to work life balance and developing employability. They will more likely be willing to leave their company if promises related to their development opportunities are not met. Additionally, breaking

promises related to employability development can result in neglectful behavior such as absenteeism and lateness. These results are consistent with the notion that building competencies is a critical task that enhances employees' affective commitment and their intention to remain part of the organization. As suggested in work on the changing psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995) and contrary to what Finegold et al. (2002) found, all employees seem to have a more transactional relationship with their firms. It reflects their increasing vulnerability in today's era of downsizing, along with a short term view of their relationship to the company. This might be exacerbated in the retail industry. Another factor that enhances commitment for both younger and older employees is their ability to get involved in decision making. Although the employees did not hold management positions, they expected their employer to respect their opinions, to allow them to have initiative in order to make a difference. Being fair, for both older and younger employees, was related to less neglectful behavior.

There are some differences among age groups' employment preferences that appear related to individuals' age group. Two hypotheses were partially supported. An important factor that differentiates the 30-and-unders from their more senior colleagues is how they responded to inducements linked to career advancements. The greater effect of career advancement on reducing young workers' willingness to change companies is consistent with the studies that younger workers are seeking rapid advancement and otherwise they will seek employment elsewhere. If their career advancement needs are not met, they might even demonstrate neglectful behavior. In contrast, meeting the younger workers' needs for support has less impact on their intention to leave making it more important for their older counterparts to be able to count on resources and support in an era of rationalization and cutting costs. In that same sense, younger employees are less sensitive than their older colleagues to the employers providing for a pleasant environment fostering cooperation and consideration for employees. Fulfilling such needs are negatively related to commitment for younger worker, however they enhance the affective commitment of older workers.

Contrary to predictions, we found that neither younger or older people, who are likely to have more family obligations, show strong positive relationship between fulfillment of work-life balance expectations and commitment. However, it is important to point out that given the tested population, balancing work and family was a less important issue since employees who wanted to work part time could do so and that the employer was frequently offering full time job to employees who needed to change their status.

As stated by Finegold et al. (2002), the overall pattern of findings indicates that there are greater similarities than differences among age groups. Given the small amount of variance accounted for by age interactions, even the statistically significant differences between the youngest workers and the others have little practical significance. This pattern of findings poses difficulties for managers seeking to foster the commitment and retention of younger employees by providing more specific inducements. At the same time, fulfilling employability development needs, fairness and providing opportunities for decision making have a significant impact on commitment, turnover intentions and neglectful behavior for all age groups.



## Conclusion

The key theoretical contribution of our study is integrating the psychological contract framework and generational research to better understand variation in attitudes and behaviors according to age differences. While we found statistically significant age differences consistent with our predictions, our results indicate the importance of not exaggerating the differences among age groups.

Our study has important limitations. The nature of our sample and research methods places some clear limits on our ability to generalize the findings. First, the cross-sectional design of the study places limits on the interpretation of our findings since our predictor variables are drawn from the same survey instrument. Second, the size of the moderator effects is small and should thus be treated with caution. Our results, however, are consistent with most social science studies, which have found it difficult to detect moderator effects in field research. An important limitation in interpreting our results is that we focused on a specific type of the workforce: employees working in retail stores. This population holds predominantly part time jobs, which may explain why we observed no significant age differences between employees holding different type of contracts. It would be interesting to test whether similar findings emerge for other types of workers in different countries' cultures, industry and labor market contexts.

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