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# Understanding Motivational Factors in Business Environment: Difference Between Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Y

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<p>The purpose of the thesis is to research and evaluate the motivational differences between three different generations, Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) and generation Y (born between 1981 and 200), in business environment.</p> <p>As the earlier studies regarding the topic suggest, there are notable differences between the generations' preferred rewarding systems and working environments, for example. Due to these expected differences in the characteristics and motivational factors of each generation, a quantitative research was conducted to gain a deeper understanding on how can leaders and managers improve the performance of their employees by using different motivational strategies.</p> <p>The results obtained from the survey suggested that the generations do have differences in terms of motivational factors as well as in the preferred job characteristics. The generations considered different rewards important, valued different type of work atmosphere, appreciated different job characteristics and perceived the meaning of work differently. Nevertheless, there were some surprising similarities between the three generations that did not coincide with the secondary data.</p> <p>This information can prove itself useful as managers and leaders today are challenged with retaining the talented employees. Globalization, as an example, has transformed the job market and therefore the employees are highly movable, which increases the competition between the companies to attract and maintain the talented personnel.</p>	
Keywords	Motivation, generations, generational differences

## Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Relevance of the research	1
1.2	Limitations of the research	3
2	Literature review	3
2.1	The three generations	3
2.1.1	Baby Boomers	4
2.1.2	Generation X	5
2.1.3	Generation Y	5
3	The Concept for Motivation	5
3.1	Defining motivation	5
3.2	Popular Motivational Strategies	6
3.2.1	Empowerment and Participation	6
3.2.2	Reward system	7
4	Motivation Theories	7
4.1	The Hierarchy of Needs: Maslow	7
4.1.1	The five hierarchies	8
4.1.2	The usefulness of the theory	9
4.2	Two-Factor Theory: Herzberg	10
4.2.1	The usefulness of the theory	11
4.3	Acquired-Needs Theory: McClelland	11
4.3.1	The usefulness of the theory	11
4.4	Expectancy Theory: Vroom	12
4.4.1	The usefulness of the theory	13
5	Research methodology	14
5.1	The hypothesis	14
5.1.1	Baby Boomers	15
5.1.2	Generation X	15
5.1.3	Generation Y	15
5.2	Research methods used	15
5.3	Data Collection	16
5.4	Reliability & Validity	17
5.5	Limitations	18

6	Primary data: Findings	18
6.1	Rewarding	19
6.1.1	Baby Boomers	20
6.1.2	Generation X	22
6.1.3	Generation Y	24
6.2	Preferred job characteristics	26
6.2.1	Baby Boomers	26
6.2.2	Generation X	28
6.2.3	Generation Y	30
6.3	Importance of feedback and meaning of work	32
6.3.1	Baby Boomers	32
6.3.2	Generation X	34
6.3.3	Generation Y	35
6.4	Comparative table	37
7	Conclusions	38
	References	41
	Appendices	
	Appendix 1. The questionnaire	

## 1 Introduction

Nowadays attracting and retaining workforce is a true challenge for many organizations. Gregory P. Smith (2011) contends that retaining employees and motivating them to become as productive as possible should be a major concern for the employers, since highly skilled people are always in demand, no matter what the current economic situation is.

Since the workforce is more movable than ever before due to globalization, the companies are competing about the international talent rather than just the local employees. "To be successful in today's global rivalry market, organizations need to focus more on transforming their working environments to motivate their employees to engage in behaviour that is consistent with their goal" (Amar, 2004). Therefore, it is important to understand how the employees can be motivated and managed, and how the employees can be satisfied.

### 1.1 Relevance of the research

Today the work force mainly consists of three different generations as the figure 1 presents below: Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) and Generation Y, also referred to as "Millennials" (born between 1981 and 2000) (Pew Research Center 2015; Goldbeck 2015).

## Labor Force Composition by Generation

*% of the labor force*

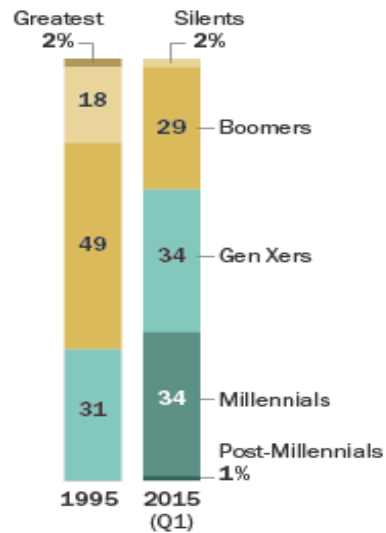


Figure 1. Labor Force Composition by Generation.

Since the three generations have very different premises due to the major events and changes in the world over time, the assumption is that the factors that motivate these generations also vary a lot amongst each other:

Today's multi-generational workplace poses a challenge for managers leading age-diverse teams. Generational differences in values and job expectations can be a cause of conflict hindering productivity in the workplace. Managers must recognize the generational differences so that individualized approaches can be made with motivation, recruitment, and retention. (Goldbeck 2015)

There are also articles and literature available that take into consideration the four latest generations, however, since the fourth generation, "Traditionalists", born between 1922 and 1945, have most likely retired, including them into the research is not relevant.

Furthermore, the majority of current studies focus only on two generations, Generation X and Generation Y, and their motivational factors. Even if the majority of the workforce consist of these two generations in the future, the majority of Baby Boomers are still working and therefore cannot be cropped out of the study as irrelevant just yet.

Moreover, the next generation, the Generation Z or Post Millennials, born between 2001 and 2012, are now between 3 and 16 years old, and consequently still attending educational institutions rather than working fulltime. For this reason, conducting a survey about their motivational factors in business environment is not relevant at this point.

## 1.2 Limitations of the research

Due to the broad topic of the thesis, there are some limitations that should be considered and understood while applying any theory or findings. Firstly, generalization should be understood as a representation of a phenomenon that was created by using few examples only, and therefore it can never represent the absolute truth of the topic.

Even though some generalization is essential in order to be able to develop a theory and conduct a research, there are factors such as culture and educational background that are always individual and shaping the responses of the participants.

Furthermore, one should also consider that even though the generations are likely to have a different approach to motivation, some of the factors might change in the future as that specific generation grows older, say, the age might have an affect on the motivational factors, not only the life experiences and characteristics of that specific generation.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 The three generations

Since the generations have experienced life in different manners due to the events that have defined their worldview and perspectives, the rapid technological advancement or globalization, for example, it is to be expected that also the characteristics of each of the generations are somewhat different.

The table 2 below compares the workplace characteristics of the three generations (Talent at Work: Recruitment and Career Blog 2015). According to it, Baby Boomers are motivated by money, title and recognition. They are said to be efficient workers who prefer working in teams, and they need to feel they are needed and appreciated. They

also find it difficult to find a balance between work and free time, contrarily to the other two generations studied.

Table 1. Workplace Characteristics Comparative<sup>(2)</sup>

Workplace Characteristics Comparative <sup>(2)</sup>			
	Generation Baby Boomers (1943-1960)	Generation X (1960-1981)	Generation Y (1982-2001)
<b>Work Ethic &amp; Values</b>	Workaholics, work efficiently, personal fulfillment, desire quality, question authority	Eliminate the task, self-reliance, want structure and direction, skeptical	What's next, multitasking, tenacity, entrepreneurial, tolerant, goal-oriented
<b>Work Is...</b>	An exciting adventure	A difficult challenge, a contract	A means to an end, fulfillment
<b>Leadership Style</b>	Consensual, collegial	Everyone is the same, challenge others, ask why	Not yet determined
<b>Interactive Style</b>	Team player, loves meetings	Entrepreneur	Participative
<b>Communications</b>	In person	Direct, Immediate	E-mail, Voice mail
<b>Feedback</b>	Don't appreciate it	Sorry to interrupt, but how am I doing?	Whenever I want it at the push of a button
<b>Rewards</b>	Money, title, recognition	Freedom is the best reward	Meaningful work
<b>Messages That Motivate</b>	You are valued, you are needed	Do it your way, forget the rules	You will work with other bright creative people
<b>Work &amp; Family Life</b>	No balance, work to live	Balance	Balance

The Generation X appreciates free time over other rewards, and prefers completing tasks without strict guidelines. They appreciate structure and direct communication. They have a sceptical attitude and they need structure and direction in their working environment. (Talent at Work: Recruitment and Career Blog 2015).

The Generation Y considers work as a means to an end; however, they enjoy meaningful work that gives them the sense of fulfilment. This generation also is able to balance between work and family life. They enjoy multitasking and are considered to be entrepreneurial and goal-oriented. (Talent at Work: Recruitment and Career Blog 2015).

### 2.1.1 Baby Boomers

The Baby Boomers are the generation who were born between 1946 and 1964. The term is often referred to people from the United States, but it also implies to Australians, Canadians and Europeans. After the Second World War, the economy was rapidly growing and the birth rates rose considerably (Allianz 2014).



Due to their current age, Baby Boomers have a lot of experience and knowledge to offer for their companies and for the younger employees. Johnson & Johnson (2010) explains that as Baby Boomers start to retire, the companies need to be careful and prepared to replace the boomers who have a lot to offer due to their vast experience, since it might be surprisingly challenging for the organizations.

Baby Boomers are described as team players whom love meetings and teamwork, do not appreciate feedback, and consider title and extrinsic rewards important (Value Options, N.D.).

### 2.1.2 Generation X

Born between 1965 and 1980, the generation X is often described as independent and entrepreneurial generation: Many of them grew up in an environment where mothers were rather working than staying home with the children, and divorce became a popular phenomenon changing the family structure (Thielholdt & Scheef 2004).

The generation X tends to communicate in a direct manner, and enjoy freedom and the possibility to do things without strict guidelines. This generation appreciates feedback from their managers and have good work-life balance (Value Options N.D.).

### 2.1.3 Generation Y

The generation Y, often also referred to as Millennials, are the generation born between 1981 and 2000, and therefore the youngest generation included in the research. The events that have had a great impact on the generation are globalization, rapid technological advancement, and the Great Recession, for example (Buckley et al. 2015; Ng et al. 2010).

Generation Y is often described as optimistic and participative generation with high expectations for recognition and rewards. It is also stated that feedback is expected and often required. Millennials enjoy working in teams and they have a good work-life balance (Buckley et al. 2015; Howe et al. 2000).

## **3 The Concept for Motivation**

### 3.1 Defining motivation

The vast term of motivation has been defined numerous times, and the difficulty of perfectly defining it lays in the fact that there are so many different aspects of it (Pinder 2008). However, it is essential to understand the role of motivation in employee performance.

Perry and Porter (1982) describe motivation as the forces that energize, direct and sustain one's behaviour. Pinder (1998) defined motivation as internal and external forces that initiate work-related behaviour, determining its form, direction, intensity and duration.

To conclude, motivation is one of the factors that highly affect job performance. Motivated employees have strong performance: They provide outstanding service for customers, achieve goals effectively, or produce innovative ideas for the company. Therefore, it is also important to know if one's performance is low, what is the reason for it and how to improve it.

However, motivation alone is not sufficient for good performance. Ability to do one's tasks, say, have the required skills and knowledge for the job, as well as the environmental factors, such as resources, are all required for good job performance (An Introduction to Organizational Behavior N.D.).

## 3.2 Popular Motivational Strategies

### 3.2.1 Empowerment and Participation

The work motivation of employees can be improved using different strategies. Empowerment and participation are commonly used methods that managers implement in their work organizations to influence the motivation through transferring some decision-making authority to the employees, and hence improving performance.

Empowerment refers to the process of allowing employees to make decisions and set their own work objectives, for example. However, this should be done in the sphere of their responsibility (Griffin 2009). In order to provide empowerment, the employees should be trained properly and they should be well educated about problem solving strategies (Redsteer N.D.).

Participation, also referred to as employee involvement, includes encouraging the employees to provide opinions and input in to the business operations. Hence, the employees feel more appreciated and valued (Redsteer N.D.). When a worker is given the opportunity to decide how to do their job, say, to decide which tools or materials to use, their productivity is likely to increase (Griffin 2009).

### 3.2.2 Reward system

Another very commonly used strategy for increasing employee motivation and performance is the reward system. “An organizational reward system is the formal and informal mechanisms by which employee performance is defined, evaluated and rewarded.” (Griffin 2008). The relationship of rewards and motivation are then linked, leading presumably to higher level of performance, especially when the rewards are desirable for the employees.

There are several different methods of reward systems used. Probably the most known of them is the merit reward system. In this method, the employees are rewarded based on the value of their contributions to the company. The system includes for example annual salary raises based on their merit (Griffin 2008).

Another popular method used is the incentive reward system. The incentives are the rewards that are promised to the employees when they reach a certain objective. Therefore, the rewarding is more prompt and usually given shortly after the objective has been reached. However, this method should be only used if the performance of the employees can be objectively evaluated (Griffin 2008).

## 4 Motivation Theories

In this section several existing motivation theories are reviewed and discussed. The theories are well-known approaches to motivation, all providing a unique input about the topic.

### 4.1 The Hierarchy of Needs: Maslow

An often-referred to theory when discussing about motivation is the theory of hierarchy of needs by humanist psychologist Abraham Maslow. The concept was first introduced in 1943, and has affected numerous of different fields ever since.

The aim of the theory was to understand what motivates people. Maslow introduced an idea that there is a set of motivation systems possessed by people, unrelated to unconscious desires or rewards. When one needs is satisfied, the person seeks to fulfil the next one (McLeod 2007).

Additionally, the lower level needs to be fulfilled before satisfying the higher level needs. These needs are usually displayed as hierarchical levels in a pyramid, which can be divided into basic needs (deficiency needs), and growth needs (McLeod 2007).

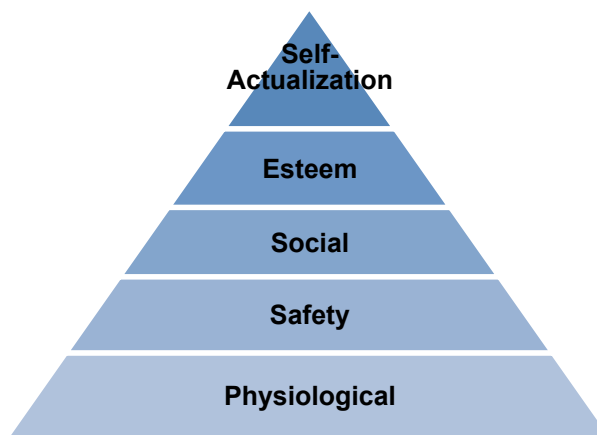


Figure 2. Hierarchy of needs - Maslow

Physiological, safety, social and esteem needs are the lowest levels in the pyramid, and they compile the basic needs. The highest hierarchy of the pyramid, the self-actualization, is referred to as growth needs.

#### 4.1.1 The five hierarchies

The first level, physiological needs, refer to biological needs. They are the strongest needs since if one is deprived of all needs, the biological needs would need to be satisfied first (Simons et al. 1987). These needs include food, oxygen and water, for example.

The second hierarchy is safety. The feeling of safety can be fulfilled once the physiological needs are met. The needs for safety include law and order, stability and feeling of security. Usually adults tend to have only a little awareness of their needs for securi-

ty in normal condition, but for example in times of social structure fail, for example rioting, the need to be safe becomes current (Simons et al. 1987).

The need for love, affection and belongingness is the third hierarchical level in the pyramid. After the two previous levels of basic needs are fulfilled, the need for love can emerge. According to Maslow, the people aim to avoid feeling of loneliness, which involves both giving and receiving love and affection (Simons et al. 1987).

The fourth level, the self-esteem, is the last hierarchy of the basic needs. Once the three previous groups of needs are fulfilled, the need for esteem becomes dominant. Maslow states that people have the need for high level of self-respect and also respect from others, and once these needs are met, one feels self-confident and a valuable individual (Simons et al. 1987).

The need for self-actualization is the highest and most complex need and is considered to be a growth need rather than a basic need. To fulfil the need for self-actualization, one must fulfil all the foregoing needs prior to the need for self-actualization becoming dominant. Maslow describes the need as self-fulfilment, furthermore, as a need to do what one was born to do (Simons et al. 1987).

#### 4.1.2 The usefulness of the theory

To understand the needs of the employees is an essential skill for managers to motivate their personnel. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory has provided important insight for leaders and managers to understand and develop ways to satisfy the employees' emerging needs (Ramlall 2004).

One method to find out the needs of the employees is to create support programs and focus groups for employees that provide assistance and encouragement for the employees. These groups can help the workers to deal with stress during challenging times, as well as help the management to learn to understand the needs of the employees more precisely (Kreitner 1998, cited by Ramlall 2004).

There are several ways managers can implement to create more ways to satisfy the different needs of the employees. For example, to satisfy the physiological needs, employers can provide vending machines and cafeteria services. To improve the feeling of

security of its employees, companies might want to consider providing retirement and medical benefits and ensure stable salary distribution for its employees (Ramlall 2004).

To satisfy the need of affiliation, managers could improve the team spirit by creating social activities outside the office, for example. These meet ups should allow everyone to participate equally.

Furthermore, giving appropriate training for the employees when needed and offering rewards and recognition when applicable can satisfy the need of esteem of the employees; they should feel appreciated and valued (Ramlall 2004).

When it comes to self-actualization, challenging tasks that require creativity can be an efficient way of satisfying the need of employees' self-actualization. However, one should keep in mind that before self-actualization becomes a dominant need, the basic needs should be satisfied (Ramlall 2004).

#### 4.2 Two-Factor Theory: Herzberg

Frederick Herzberg studied the factors that satisfied them on their job and what dissatisfied them. Herzberg discovered that the satisfying factors and the dissatisfying factors were very different (An Introduction to Organizational Behavior N.D.).

The dissatisfying factors Herzberg labelled as Hygiene factors. These included working conditions, salary, and job security, for example. Herzberg pointed out that if a person has a bad working condition, say, he is being harassed, he is probably not very motivated. However, on the other hand, if the situation was the opposite and the person was not harassed, he would not be more motivated, since he would take the situation for granted (An Introduction to Organizational Behavior N.D.).

The motivators on the other hand, are the factors that are related to the content of the work. These include the achievement, recognition, responsibility and the opportunity to advancement and growth (Griffin 2008). Furthermore, if these factors are present, they are likely to add satisfaction, and on the contrary, if none of the motivation factors are present, they do not provide any satisfaction to the employee. However, it is important to note that lack of the motivation factors do not necessarily create dissatisfaction. Al-

so, even if the hygiene factors are all fulfilled, they do not tend to create satisfaction. (Griffin 2008).

#### 4.2.1 The usefulness of the theory

The two dimensions of the theory implies that even if the hygiene factors (dissatisfaction factors) are fulfilled, satisfaction of the employees is not guaranteed, due to the lack of motivation factors that can develop the satisfaction of the employee. A leader or a manager trying to motivate employees only by offering hygiene factors, such as salary and good working conditions, is not likely to succeed. They must also provide motivation factors, such as responsibility and growth opportunities in order to create satisfaction (Griffin 2008).

#### 4.3 Acquired-Needs Theory: McClelland

Additionally, the researchers have found that there are three main needs that are highly important for individuals in organizational settings (Griffin 2008). These needs are achievement, affiliation and power. The Acquired Needs Theory was introduced by David McClelland who states that these needs are acquired individually as a result of one's life experience (An Introduction to Organizational Behavior N.D.).

The first need, the need for achievement, can be defined as the need to accomplish and to be successful. Individuals who have high need for achievement, are constantly seeking ways to improve their performance and looking for challenging goals (Campbell, 1982, cited in An Introduction to Organizational Behavior N.D.).

The need for affiliation is similar to the social need for love and affiliation, introduced by Maslow. The individuals with high need for affiliation need to feel accepted by others and they tend to perform better in jobs that include a lot of human interaction (Griffin 2008).

On the other hand, the individuals with high need for power want to have an influence on others and control their surroundings. Even if the urge for control can at times be a negative element in relationships, people with high need for power also tend to be more influential than others which can lead to positive outcomes (Griffin 2008).

#### 4.3.1 The usefulness of the theory

Even if the theory suggests the three different types of needs, one should be careful when generalizing people by their dominating needs. It might be that an individual is very neutral in terms of the three acquired needs, and therefore all of these characteristics describe him equally or not at all.

However, this approach proves itself useful when motivating people, who score high with one of these needs:

- High need for achievement: The individuals with high need for achievement require challenges and frequent feedback on their performance. Even if money is not an important motivator for these individuals, it can be an effective form of feedback (NetMBA N.D.).
- High need for affiliation: People with a high need for affiliation tend to perform best in an environment with a cooperative atmosphere (NetMBA N.D.).
- High need for power: The individuals seeking for power enjoy managing others and allowing them can be an effective way of motivating them.

#### 4.4 Expectancy Theory: Vroom

The expectancy theory was first introduced by Victor Vroom in 1964, and was further extended by Porter and Lawler in 1968. The theory aims to explain the decision-making process of an individual, say, why he chooses to act in a way he does, rather than in alternative way (Leadership Central N.D.).

This decision-making process estimates the motivational force (MF) of three different behavioural options that arise from the individual's perception of the probability that he will reach the desired outcome:

1. Expectancy: Does the individual feel confident that he can achieve the set objective?
2. Valence: Does the individual believe it is beneficial to complete the objective?
3. Instrumentality: Does the individual believe that achieving the objective will lead to obtaining the reward? (Learn Management 2 N.D.).

In the decision-making process, the individual decides among the behavioural options and selects the option with the highest motivation force. (QuickMBA N.D.).

$$\text{MF} = \text{Expectancy} \times \text{Instrumentality} \times \text{Valence}$$



Therefore, if any of the perceptions are zero, the equation becomes zero, which denotes that the motivation force is zero. (QuickMBA N.D.) Additionally, the higher the value of the motivational force is, the more motivated the individual is to reach for that reward.

#### 4.4.1 The usefulness of the theory

The expectancy theory is widely accepted theory, and the current research is supporting the concepts that it proposes. However, implementing the theory can be challenging for leaders and managers in organizational settings, since there are sub-cognitive factors that also effect on the decision-making process (Leadership Central N.D.).

In order for a manager to make assumptions on the motivational force of the reward for the employee, the reward system needs to follow the “The Law of Effect” that suggests the following:

1. Behaviour that is positively rewarded is likely to augment in frequency
2. Behaviour that is negatively rewarded (or not recognized) is likely to diminish in frequency
3. The behaviour is also affected by the reinforcement and timing (Learn Management 2).

Furthermore, the managers can influence on the three perceptions and hence increase the motivation of the employees. In case of expectancy, if the employees feel as they are not capable of completing the tasks given, one solution could be organize trainings where the employees are given the opportunity to learn the required skills and abilities to complete the tasks (An Introduction to Organizational Behavior N.D.).

If managers seek to influence the valence, managers should find out what type of rewards the employees consider attractive. Talking to employees and conducting surveys are useful ways to understand the diverging needs of the employees. Therefore, one idea to increase valence is to offer multiple rewards from which the employee can choose the most attractive reward for him (An Introduction to Organizational Behavior N.D.).

Finally, to increase the perception of instrumentality, managers should seek ways to show employees that their performance is rewarded. This can be using bonuses and different award systems, for example. Nevertheless, the managers should pay attention to make sure that the employees are aware of the rewards, and also clarify that the awards are given out of good performance (An Introduction to Organizational Behavior N.D.).

## **5 Research methodology**

The author decided to use a deductive approach for the research process. “A deductive approach is concerned with developing a hypothesis (or hypotheses) based on existing theory, and then designing a research strategy to test the hypothesis” (Wilson 2010).

This denotes that the research is built on theory and not vice versa, as in inductive research (Wilson 2010). As the objective of this thesis is rather to expand the knowledge of the author rather than create a new theory, deductive approach can be considered to be more suitable for the purpose.

### **5.1 The hypothesis**

Hypothesis is an assumption made in the beginning of the research, based on the previously gathered information, which the researcher tries to prove or reject. Therefore, the hypotheses were formed using the secondary data, and hence are based on the results of the previous studies.

“In social science, where direct knowledge of population parameter(s) is rare, hypothesis testing is the often used strategy for deciding whether a sample data offer such support for a hypothesis that generalization can be made.” (Kothari 2009)

Accordingly, one alternative hypothesis and a null hypothesis for each of the three generations were formed before the sample was drawn. As Kothari (2009) explains, alternative hypothesis is the hypothesis that one tries to prove, whereas the null hypothesis is a statement one tries to reject. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is the author’s preliminary assumption of the issue.

### 5.1.1 Baby Boomers

$H_1$  = Extrinsic rewards motivate Baby Boomers more than intrinsic rewards.

$H_0$  = Extrinsic rewards do not motivate Baby Boomers more than intrinsic rewards.

### 5.1.2 Generation X

$H_2$  = Generation X consider intrinsic and extrinsic rewards equally important.

$H_0$  = Generation X does not consider intrinsic and extrinsic rewards equally important.

### 5.1.3 Generation Y

$H_3$  = Intrinsic rewards motivates generation Y, more than extrinsic rewards.

$H_0$  = Intrinsic rewards do not motivate generation Y more than extrinsic rewards.

## 5.2 Research methods used

The research was carried out to collect data about the work motivation of the participants. The questionnaire (please see appendix 1) consisted of ten questions that were selected based on the initial hypothesis and the secondary data. The research questions can be found as an appendix in the end of this thesis.

The first two questions were collecting demographic data of the respondents. The age and the gender were the only demographic characteristics the author considered relevant for the study. Zikmund and Babin (2007) state that the data needs should be clarified and only the questions with a specific purpose should be included in the study.

The finalized questionnaire was established using Google Forms, and therefore, the method for administering the questionnaire was electronic. The data sheet was a self-completion questionnaire, which consisted of ten multiple choice questions with an aim to collect comparable data.

The questionnaire method was chosen as the main tool for the research since it can reach a large number of people in a short period of time with low cost, the respondents can schedule the time for answering the questions themselves, and the information

gathering from a wide geographic area will be easier than with interviews (Kirklees Council N.D).

The data used in the research was primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected with a quantitative approach to draw a representative sample from each of the age groups, and to be able to construct some generalizations with reference to the population as a whole (Hyde 2000, cited by Wilson 2010).

The method of quantitative approach for the data gathering was chosen due to the conviction and also out of the broad topic of the research. Since the motivation as a term is not an unambiguous definition, the author wanted to avoid to gathering incoherent data. Moreover, to be able to compare the findings between the different age groups, also the data gathered should be comparable.

### 5.3 Data Collection

The data was collected through stratified random sampling, which aims to assure the equal representation of the specified subgroups, in this case, different age groups (Dudovskiy N.D). The method refers to dividing the population into different subgroups or stratas, and then a simple random sample is taken from each of the subgroups. (Research Methods Knowledge Base N.D.)

The method of stratified sampling also provides relatively high statistical precision, when comparing it to simple random sampling, for example, because of the low variability within the stratas (the three generations) than within the population. (Explorable 2009) Additionally, approximately the same amount of answers were collected from each of the age groups to guarantee the highest possible statistical precision for the findings.

The respondents were all included in one of the examined generations, and their hierarchical levels were varying; some of the respondents were in general positions whereas some of them were managers. The respondents were also all Europeans, but with different nationalities, to ensure a sufficient variety.

The findings of the primary data are presented in more detail in the Results section of the thesis (see page 18). The quantitative data is presented in visual charts and graphs, followed by an explaining analysis of each of the visuals presented.

The secondary data used in the research was collected throughout the research project from books, journals, PDF-publications, e-books and from websites. The first stage of the research was the revision of the existing literature of the topic. Since secondary data is very useful for the initial research, every research process should start with a revision of the secondary data. (Novak 1996, cited by McCaston 1998).

#### 5.4 Reliability & Validity

As the objective of the research is to record as accurate data as possible, reliability and validity of the results are concerned. "Reliability is the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results." (Phelan & Wren 2005). Due to the time constraint and budget of the research, the author was not able to use very big sample size or use advanced methods to improve the reliability of the research. However, as the objective was to provide directive idea of the motivational differences between the generations, we can use this accuracy to acquire a general idea of the topic.

Another aspect of the quality of the research is the validity. As Phelan and Wren (2005) state, validity means the variable indicating if the research truly measures what it intends to measure. For example, to minimize the probability of misunderstandings of the questions asked among the participants, the multiple choice questions were written to be as simple and unambiguous as possible.

There were several techniques the author used to improve the validity of the research. As mentioned above, the questions were carefully considered to be as unambiguous as possible to ensure the resemblance in the answers of the participants. The author also consulted her supervisor prior to publishing the questionnaire (please see appendix 1) to gain an objective opinion about the questions.

The revision of the questions was also executed by several colleagues of the author to ascertain that the questions were understood correctly, and the terminology used in the questionnaire was clear and easily understandable.

According to Phelan and Wren (2005), one way to improve the validity is to compare the results with existing data available. This was another technique used by the author to improve the validity. The results were compared with the existing data available,

which also enabled the proper construction of the questions and the use of the hypothesis of the research.

### 5.5 Limitations

The main limitation the author faced during the research process was the equal data gathering from all the three age groups. The author came to realize that it was very easy to gather responses from the youngest age group, the Y generation, whereas it was much more difficult to receive as many answers from the other two groups, the baby boomers and the X generation.

Therefore the author needed to reconsider the size of the sample during the data gathering to have equal number of answers from each of the groups.

## 6 Primary data: Findings

In this section the primary data gathered through the questionnaire (please see appendix 1) is presented. The sample was drawn from each of the three age groups to be able to construct some generalized analyses about the motivational factors of the different generations.

The final combined sample size comprised of 46 respondents, and it consisted of individuals with different nationalities, who are currently working. The distribution of the respondents by their age group is presented the figure below.

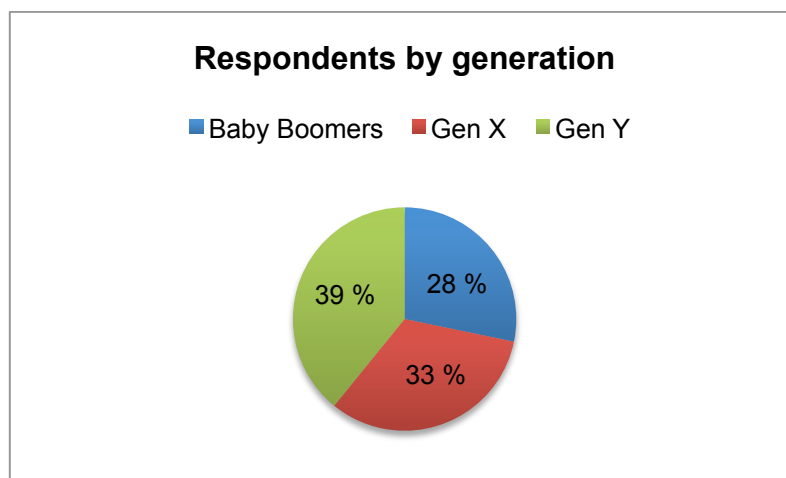


Figure 3. Respondents by generation.

Accordingly, 39% of the respondents were born between 1981 and 2000, and therefore categorized as the Y generation. 33% of the respondents were born between 1965 and 1980, and therefore referred to as generation X. 28 % of the respondents were Baby Boomers, say, respondents who were born between 1946 and 1964. To conclude, each of the generations is presented quite equally. The size of the sample is also considered to be enough for a representative sample.

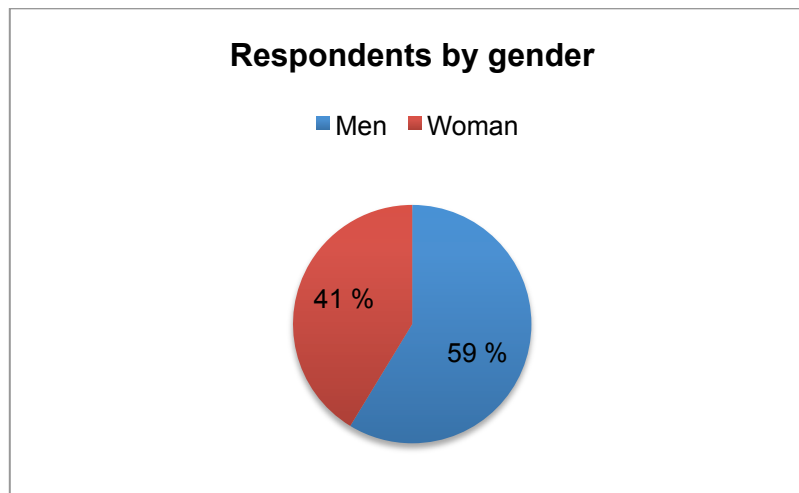


Figure 4. Respondents by gender.

In the figure above, the gender distribution of the respondents is presented by percentage. The respondents consisted of 27 males (59% of total) and 19 females (41% of total). Accordingly, the gender distribution of the study was relatively equal.

### 6.1 Rewarding

The questions from three to five focused on the importance of different rewards and work outcomes. The findings from these questions revealed whether we are able to prove the alternative hypothesis for each generation:

- Baby Boomers:  $H_1$  = Extrinsic rewards motivate Baby Boomers more than intrinsic rewards.
- Generation X:  $H_2$  = Intrinsic and extrinsic rewards are equally important for generation X.
- Generation Y:  $H_3$  = Intrinsic rewards motivates generation Y more than extrinsic rewards.

### 6.1.1 Baby Boomers

The chart below presents the results of Baby Boomers from the third question where the participants were asked to arrange the four mentioned rewards by importance on a scale from one to four, where one is the most important and four stands for the least important.

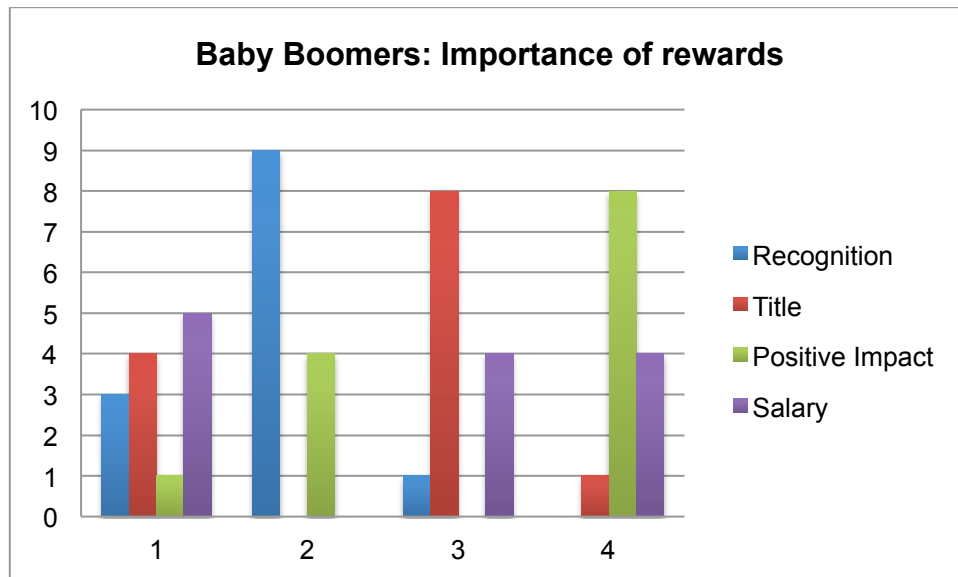


Figure 5. Baby Boomers: Importance of rewards.

As the figure above presents, the responses for the most important reward vary a lot, say, all of the rewards are mentioned at least once as the most important reward. However, the results suggest that recognition holds strong importance for the Baby Boomers since even nine (almost 70%) of the respondents chose it as the second most important reward, and three of them as the most important reward.

Similarly, title and positive impact on others appear to be the least important rewards for Baby Boomers. Title was ranked eight times as the second least important reward, whereas positive impact on others was chosen eight times as the least important outcome. This was rather surprising piece of information, since the secondary data studied suggested that title and other extrinsic rewards are important incentives for Baby Boomers (please see 2.1.1 – Baby Boomers).



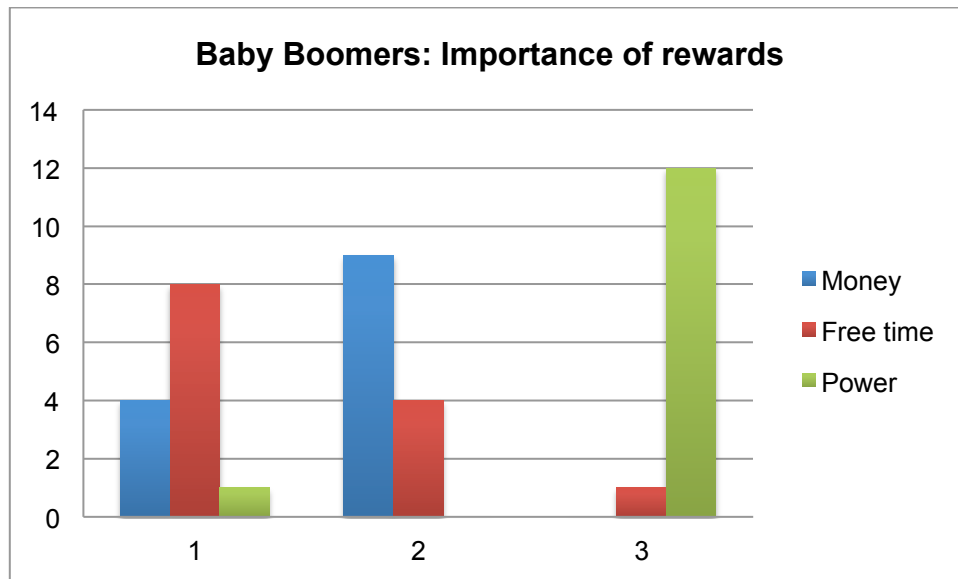


Figure 6. Baby Boomers: Importance of rewards.

In the figure above, the results from the fifth question are presented. In accordance with it, Baby Boomers seem to value free time over money and power. The results also suggest that power is the least important reward for the age group in question. This might also be an indicator of the current age of Baby Boomers, say, not only a character of the generation. Since they are currently approximately between 50 and 70 years old, they have most likely worked for numerous years already and developed their careers increasing their salaries.

Therefore, they might feel that they are more interested in spending time with their loved ones or travelling and seeing the world, once they now have the money and opportunity to do so.

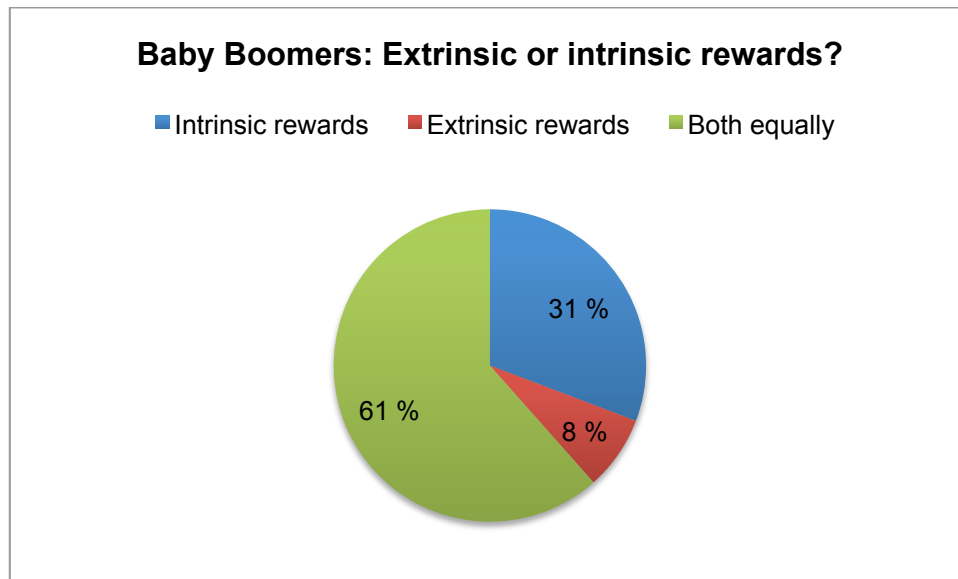


Figure 7. Baby Boomers: Extrinsic or intrinsic rewards?

The fourth question asked whether the respondents in general preferred intrinsic or extrinsic rewards. As the figure above presents, 61% of the respondents revealed that intrinsic and extrinsic rewards play equally important role for them, whereas only 8% considered extrinsic rewards as the most important rewards. These results imply that the alternative hypothesis for Baby Boomers is not to be proved. According to the results obtained, the extrinsic rewards do not motivate Baby Boomers generally more than intrinsic rewards. Therefore the null hypothesis is not rejected.

#### 6.1.2 Generation X

Regarding the preferred rewards, the preliminary assumption is that intrinsic and extrinsic rewards are equally important for generation X.

The results from the fourth question about extrinsic and intrinsic rewards were relatively similar to the answers of Baby Boomers. As it is visible from the figure below, the majority values intrinsic and extrinsic rewards equally, and only 33% of the respondents considered intrinsic rewards as the most important type of compensation. None of the respondents in the concerned age group chose extrinsic rewards as the most important rewards.

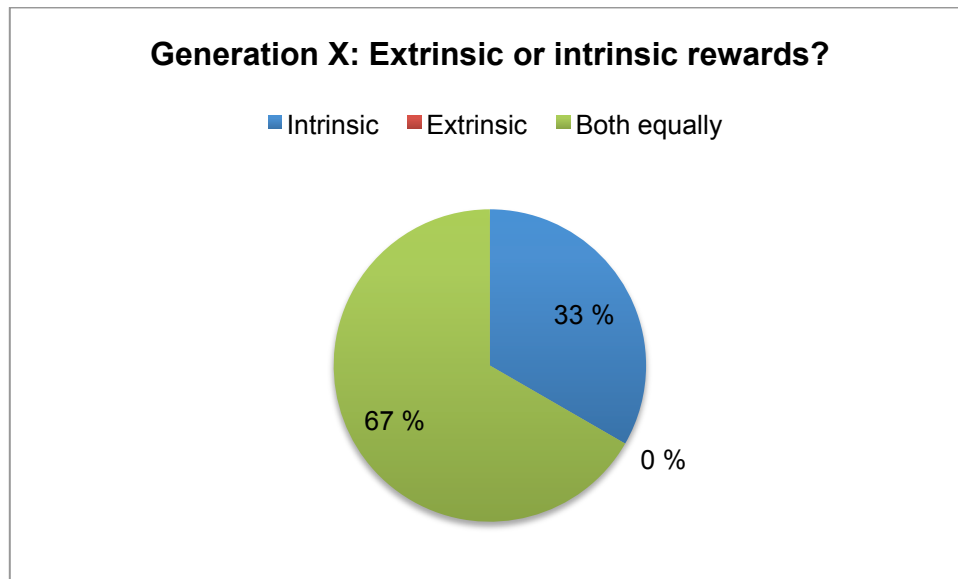


Figure 8. Generation X: Extrinsic or intrinsic rewards.

Therefore, the alternative hypothesis can be accepted. The findings support the assumption that generation X considers intrinsic and extrinsic rewards equally important.

In addition, according to the secondary data, the generation X appreciate free time over other rewards. (Talent at Work: Recruitment and Career Blog 2015). In the fifth question the respondents were asked to arrange money, free time and power by importance, to see if the results advocate. The results are presented in the figure below.

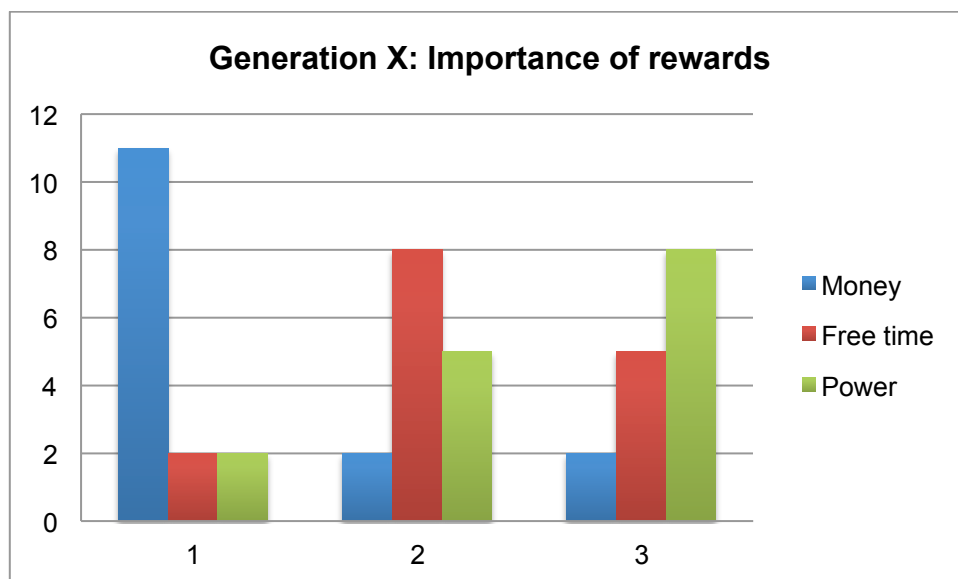


Figure 9. Generation X: Importance of rewards

Surprisingly, the results suggest that money is more important source of motivation than free time for the generation X. Even 11 respondents out of 15 answered that on a scale from one to three where one presents the most important reward, money plays the most important role. Furthermore, power is ranked as the least important reward by eight people (53% of the total number of respondents).

However, the figure below based on the answers for the third question suggests that the generation X consider positive impact on others as an important outcome of their work, unlike Baby Boomers.

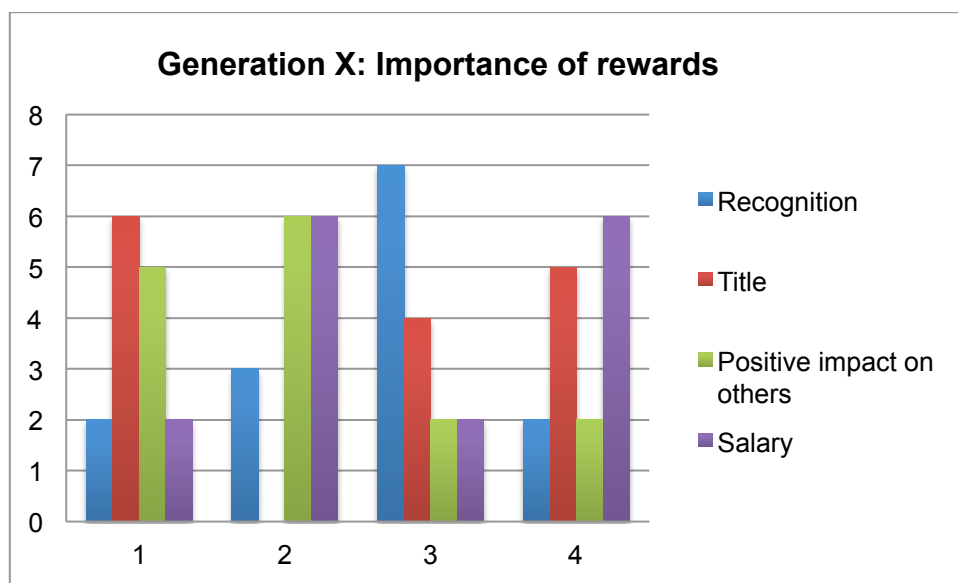


Figure 10. Generation X: Importance of rewards

Additionally, recognition seems to appear less important for generation X than for Baby Boomers. The majority of respondents in this age group classified recognition as the second least important reward.

### 6.1.3 Generation Y

The alternative hypothesis for the generation Y suggests that the generation acknowledges intrinsic rewards more important than extrinsic rewards. In the figure below the results for the fourth question about the importance of the two different types of rewards are shown.

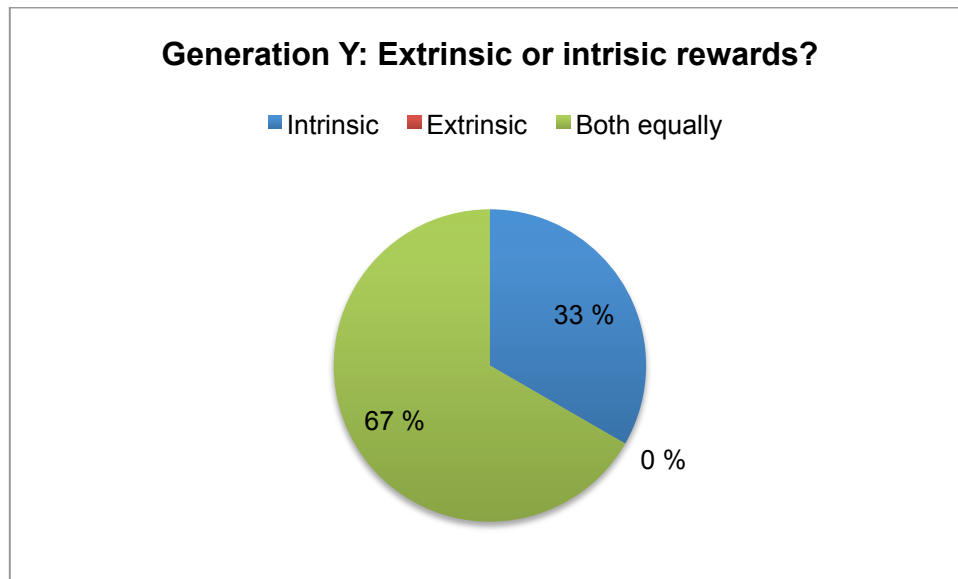


Figure 11. Generation Y: Extrinsic or intrinsic rewards?

The findings suggest that generation Y considers intrinsic and extrinsic rewards as equally important. The majority of the respondents evaluated both as equally important and only 33% of the respondents favoured intrinsic rewards over extrinsic rewards, similarly to the other two generations studied. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis for the generation Y cannot be accepted, and consequently, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

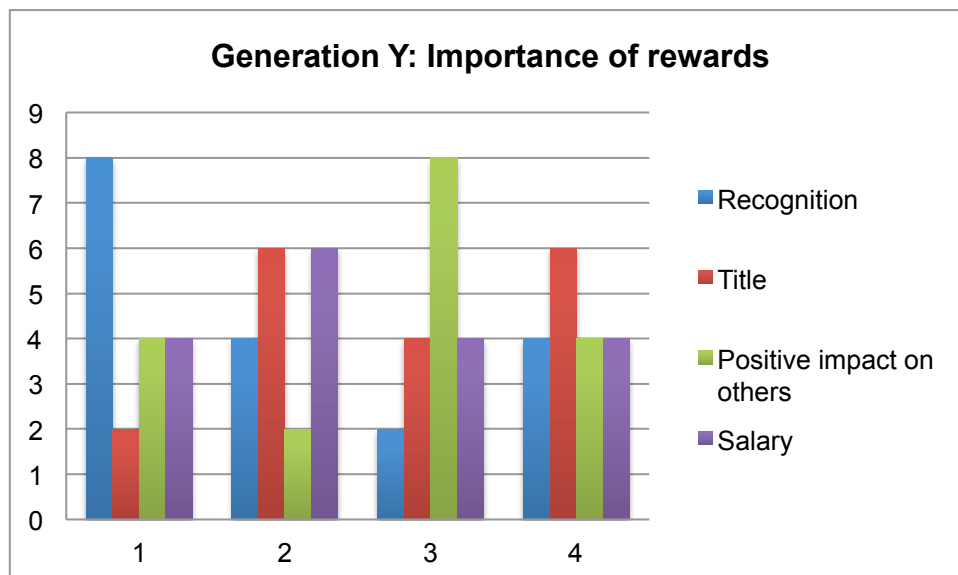


Figure 12. Generation Y: Extrinsic or intrinsic rewards?

The majority of the respondents in the Y generation classified recognition as the most important reward. It is also recognized in the existing studies that generation Y appreciates and expects frequent feedback from their managers, which is likely to lead to recognition if the feedback is positive. (Talent at Work: Recruitment and Career Blog 2015).

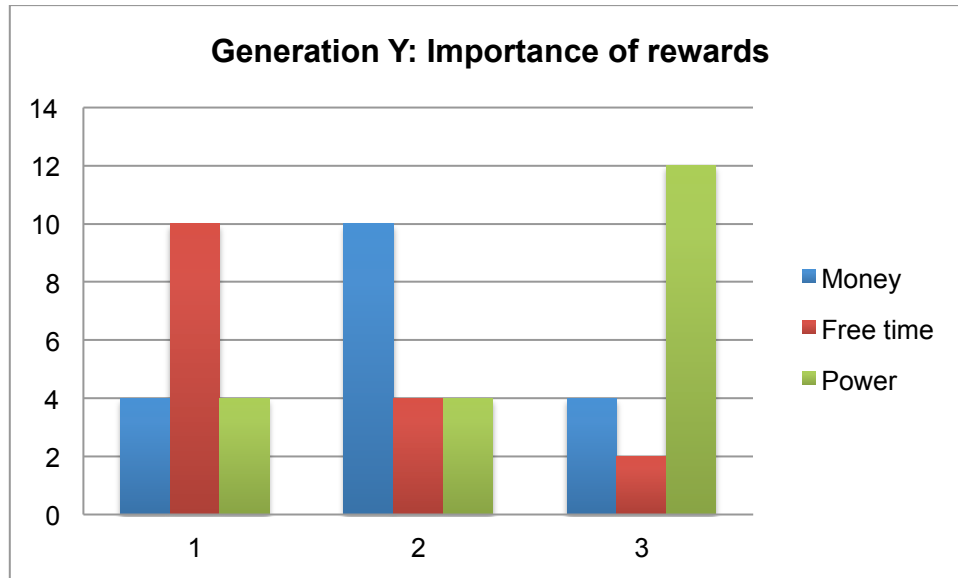


Figure 13. Generation Y: Importance of rewards.

Furthermore, the results shown in the figure above for the fifth question suggest that the generation Y values free time over money and power. The results propose that power is the least important reward for the Millennials.

## 6.2 Preferred job characteristics

### 6.2.1 Baby Boomers

The sixth question focused on the importance of five different job characteristics. The respondents were asked to arrange the characteristics by importance on a scale from one to five, where one presents the most important factor and five the least important characteristic.

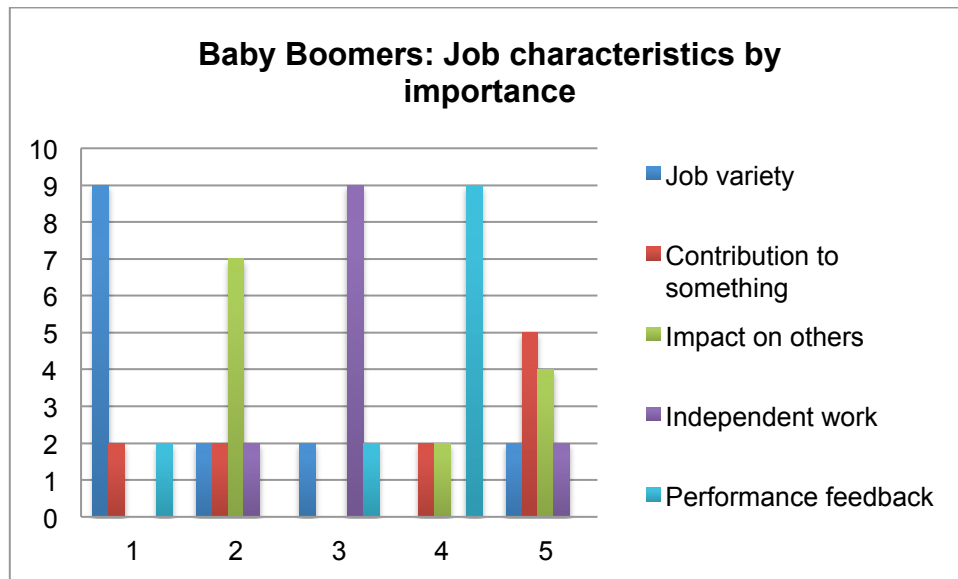


Figure 14. Baby Boomers: Job characteristics by importance.

The figure above presents the results of Baby Boomers. It appears that job variety is commonly considered as a very important characteristic: nine respondents classified it as the most important job characteristic. Furthermore, impact on others was also ranked as important, whereas performance feedback and independent work seem to be characteristics that were valued the least. The secondary data research suggested similar findings for Baby Boomers (please see 2.1 – The three generations).

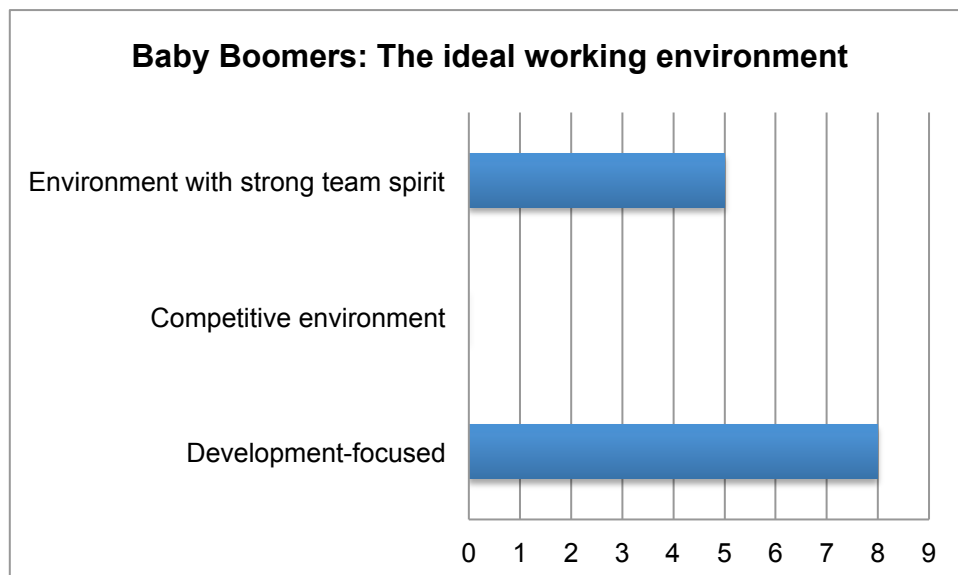


Figure 15. Baby Boomers: The ideal working environment.

The respondents were also asked about their ideal working environment (the seventh question). As shown in the results in the figure above, the respondents classified development-focused atmosphere as well as the environment with strong team spirit quite evenly.

As Baby Boomers are usually described as team players, the high ranking for the strong team spirit was to be expected, which coincides with the secondary data (please see 2.1 - The three generations). The preference on working in a team or alone was also asked specifically in the eighth question. The results are shown in the chart below.

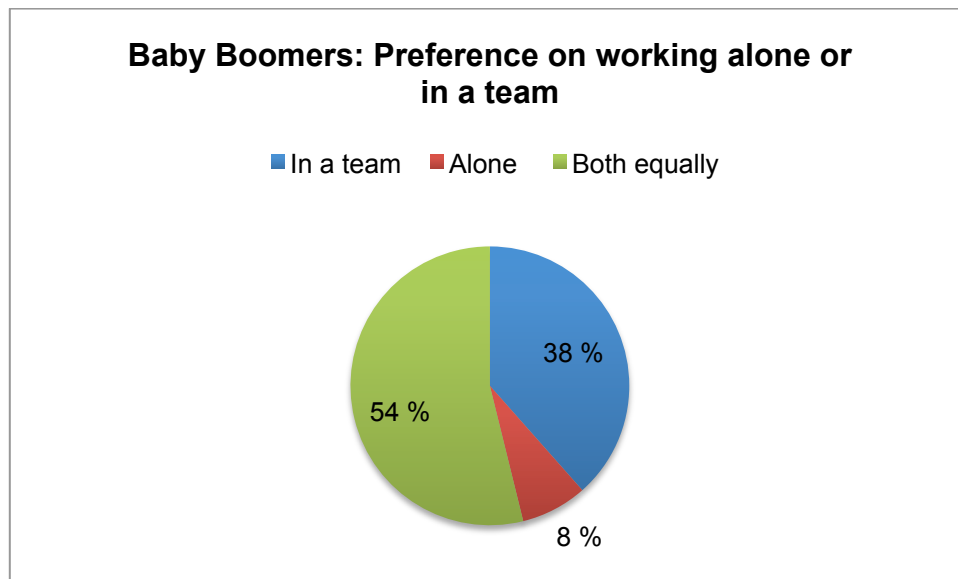


Figure 16. Baby Boomers: Preference working alone or in a team.

Majority (54%) of the respondents reported that working both alone, as well as in a team is equally satisfying for them. 38% replied that they prefer to work in a team, and only 8% of Baby Boomers preferred working alone.

### 6.2.2 Generation X

According to the secondary data (please see 2.1 - The three generations), generation X appreciates freedom in their work and dislikes strict guidelines. Accordingly, it is expected that independency is rated as an important job characteristic among the X generation. The results are shown in the figure below.



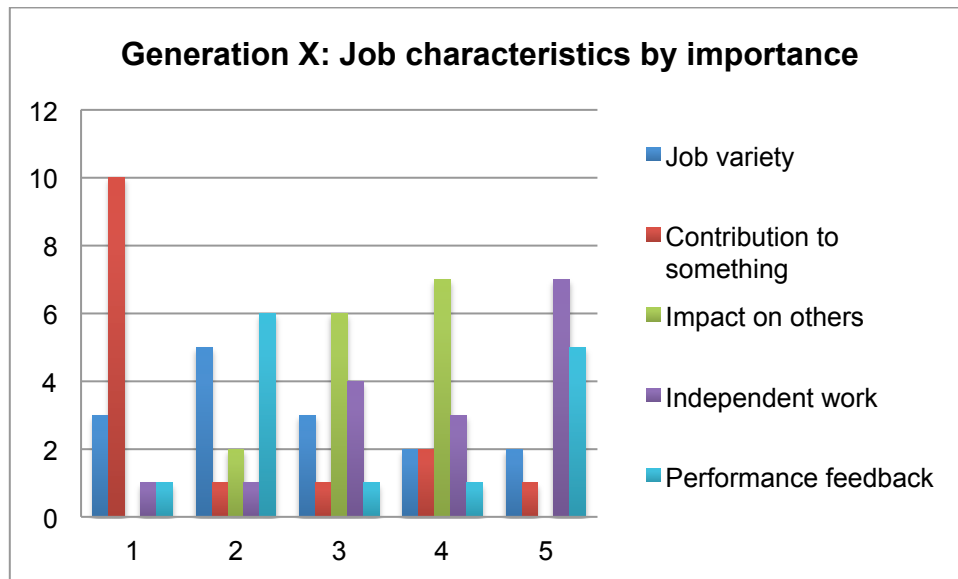


Figure 17. Generation X: Job characteristics by importance.

Surprisingly, independent work is rated as one of the least important job characteristics among the respondents. Even seven of the participants rated it as the least important characteristic.

Furthermore, contribution to something was rated as the most important job characteristic for the respondents: even 67% of the respondents chose it as the most important characteristic for them. These results suggest that members of generation X value teamwork and contribution to a team rather than independent and individualistic atmosphere.

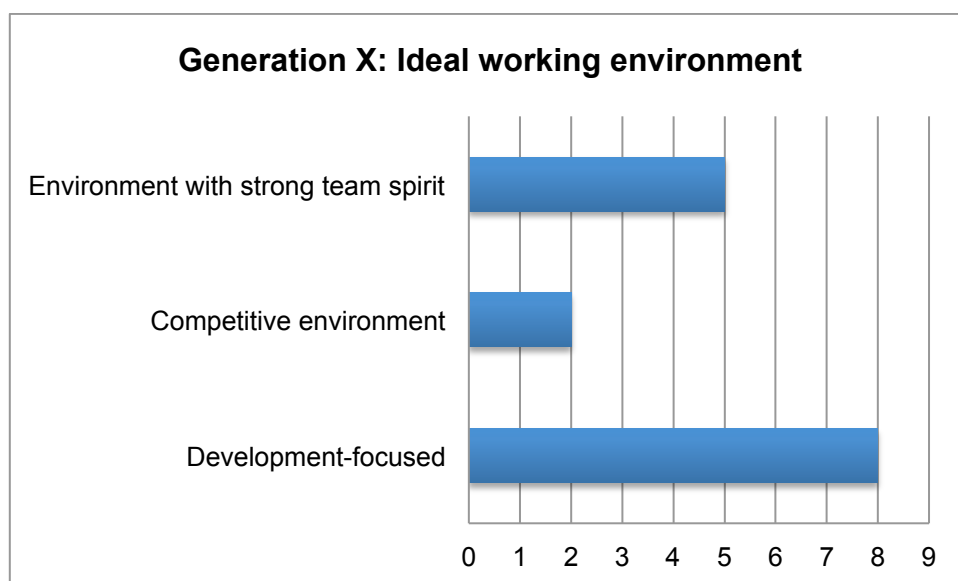


Figure 18. Generation X. Ideal working environment.

Thielfoldt and Scheef (2004) explain that generation X expects regular feedback and they are eager to learn new skills. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the figure above the results show that the majority of the respondents chose development-focused environment as the most suitable work atmosphere for them. The results also suggest that strong team spirit is important for the generation X. Additionally, only 2 respondents chose competitive environment as the most suitable work atmosphere for them.

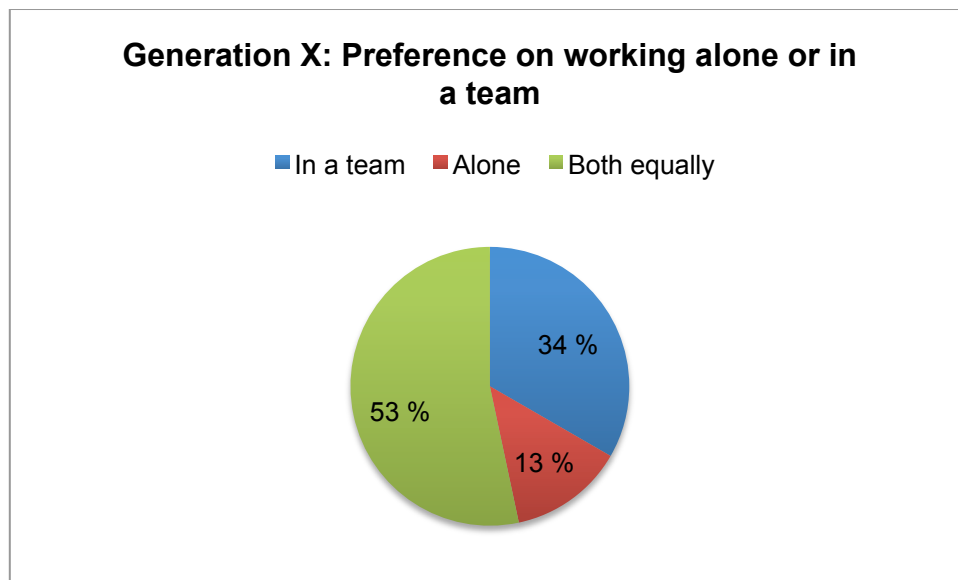


Figure 19. Generation X. Preference on working alone or in a team.

In the chart above the results for the eighth question are shown. The majority of the generation X respondents replied that working alone and in a team are equally preferred. The results are relatively similar to the results of Baby Boomers. However, as the generation X is often described with adjectives such as independent and entrepreneurial, it was assumed by the author that the number of people who preferred working alone would be higher (Thielfoldt & Scheef 2004).

### 6.2.3 Generation Y

The generation Y is described as a participative and optimistic generation who like to work in teams (Buckley et al. 2015). Therefore, it is assumed that job characteristics such as contribution to something and teamwork are important for them. The results for the question six are shown below.

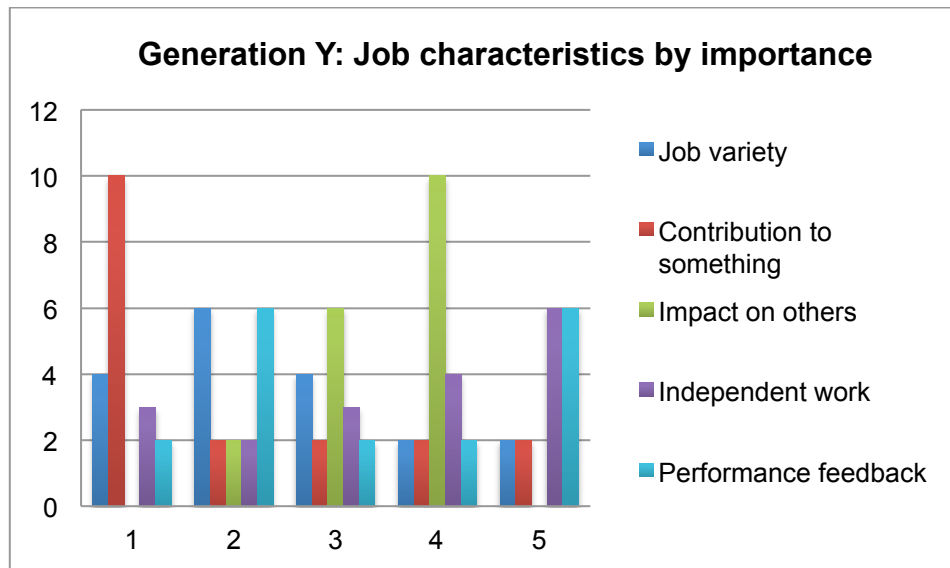


Figure 20. Generation Y: Job characteristics by importance.

Majority of the respondents chose contribution to something as the most important job characteristic for them on a scale from one to five, similarly to the generation X. The second most important characteristic appeared to be job variety. The chart suggests that characteristics such as independent work and impact on others were the least important factors for generation Y.

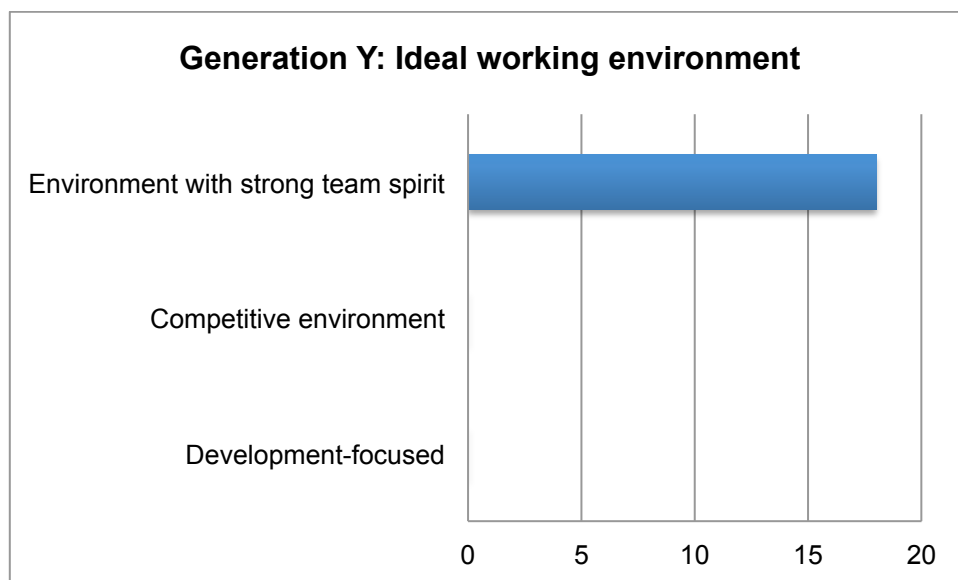


Figure 21. Generation Y: Ideal working environment.

As the secondary data (see 2.1 – The three generations) suggests, generation Y enjoys working in teams and therefore the results shown in the figure above for the sev-

enth question are not surprising: All of the respondents chose environment with strong team spirit the most suitable work atmosphere for them. The generation Y was the only generation from the three that rated the strong team spirit as the most important workplace characteristic.

Nevertheless, the majority of the respondents replied that working alone or in a team is equally important, as shown in the chart below. 33% replied that they prefer working in a team rather than alone. However, unlike the generation X and Baby Boomers, none of the respondents replied that they would prefer working alone.

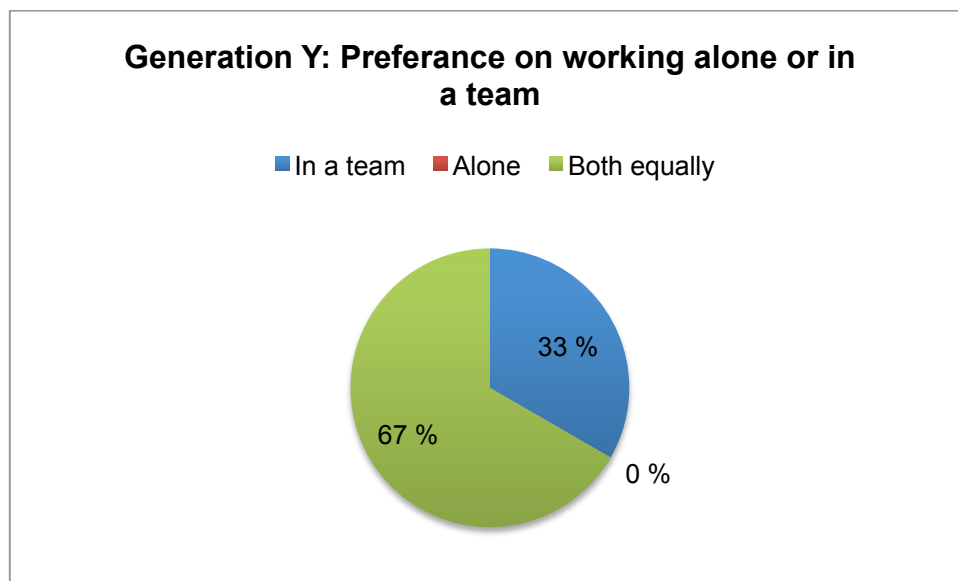


Figure 22. Generation Y: Preference on working alone or in a team.

With the findings obtained from the two figures above, it is assumed that the generation Y enjoys working in a team with good team spirit; however, they are also open for independent and individualistic work when necessary.

### 6.3 Importance of feedback and meaning of work

#### 6.3.1 Baby Boomers

The last two questions were asked to determine the importance of feedback as well as the meaning of work for each of the generations. In the ninth question, the respondents were asked to rate the relevance of feedback from their direct manager on a scale from one to five, where five represents very important and one represents not important at all.

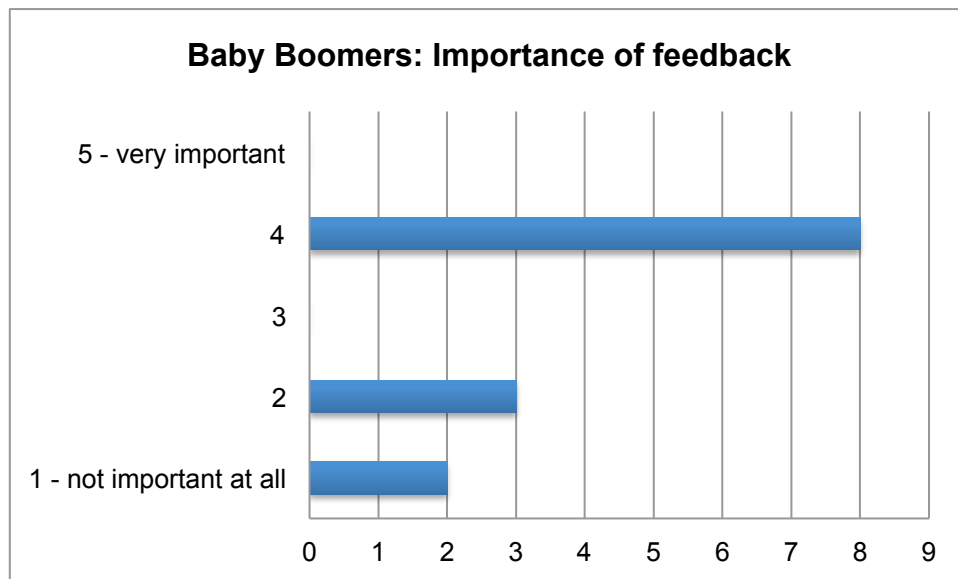


Figure 23. Baby Boomers: Importance of feedback.

In the figure above the responses of Baby Boomers are shown. In contrast with the secondary data (please see 2.1 – The three generations), majority of the participants (over 60%) reported that feedback is rather important for them. However, the rest of the participants (approximately 38%) reported that feedback is not important.

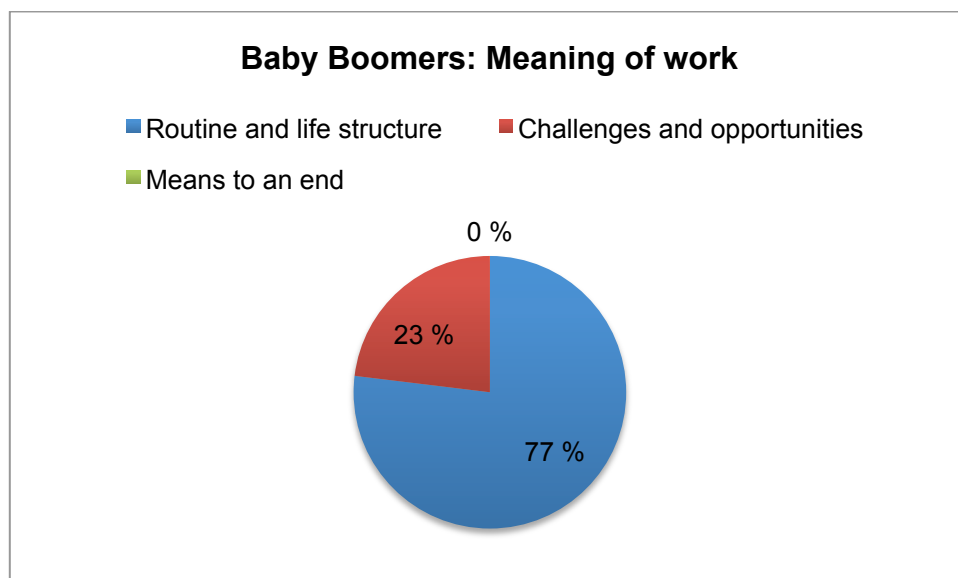


Figure 24. Baby Boomers: Meaning of work.

The tenth question was included to the study to determine the meaning of work to the generations. As the figure above presents, the majority of Baby Boomers reported that they consider work as a routine and life structure. It is also to be noted that none of the respondents considered work as a means to an end.

According to table 1 (please see page four), the previous studies conclude that work is usually recognized as an adventure among Baby Boomers. However, the data gathered rather proposes that work is seen as routine and life structure. The reason for this might lay in the differences in the participants' backgrounds or culture (please see 1.2 – Limitations of the research).

### 6.3.2 Generation X

The members of generation X expect and appreciate feedback from their managers (Thielholdt and Scheef 2004). The findings obtained from the ninth question coincide with the assumption that feedback is considered important within the X generation. The results are shown below.

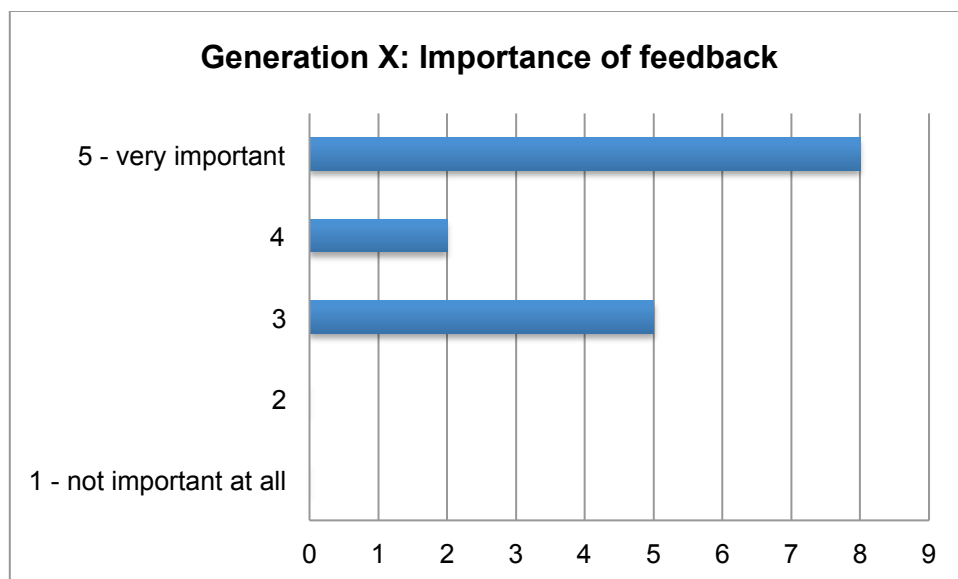


Figure 25. Generation X: Importance of feedback.

As it is visible from the figure above, the majority of the participants reported that feedback from their direct manager is very important for them. Furthermore, none of the respondents considered the feedback as not important at all. Therefore, the secondary

data and the primary data coincide: the generation X seem to appreciate and highly value feedback.

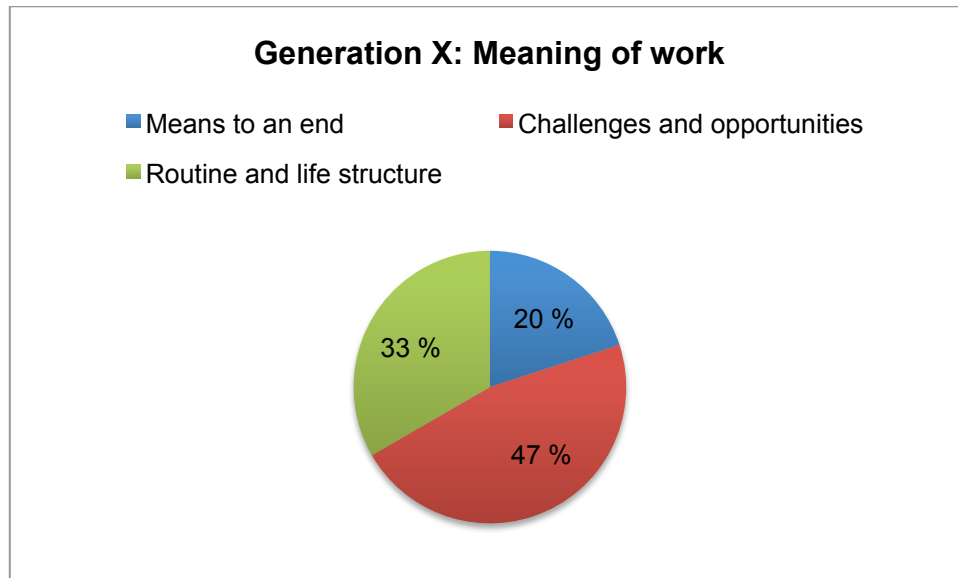


Figure 26. Generation X: Meaning of work.

In table 1 (please see page four) it is stated that generation X determines work as a difficult challenge. The results obtained from the research are relatively distributed, however, 47% of the respondents reported that work means challenges and opportunities for them. Therefore, the results fairly coincide with the secondary data. In addition, the difference between the responses of Baby Boomers and generation X is notable (please see figure 23 on page 32).

### 6.3.3 Generation Y

The generation Y is characterised as a generation valuing and expecting frequent feedback from their supervisors:

“Perhaps not surprisingly, “manager quality” was rated as a top motivational factor (after pay) for Millennials, since they want an atmosphere where supervisors and managers are constantly available for feedback” (Corporate Leadership Council 2004 cited by Ng et al. 2010)

Therefore, it is assumed that also the primary data provides similar results. The results for the ninth question about the relevance of feedback are shown below.

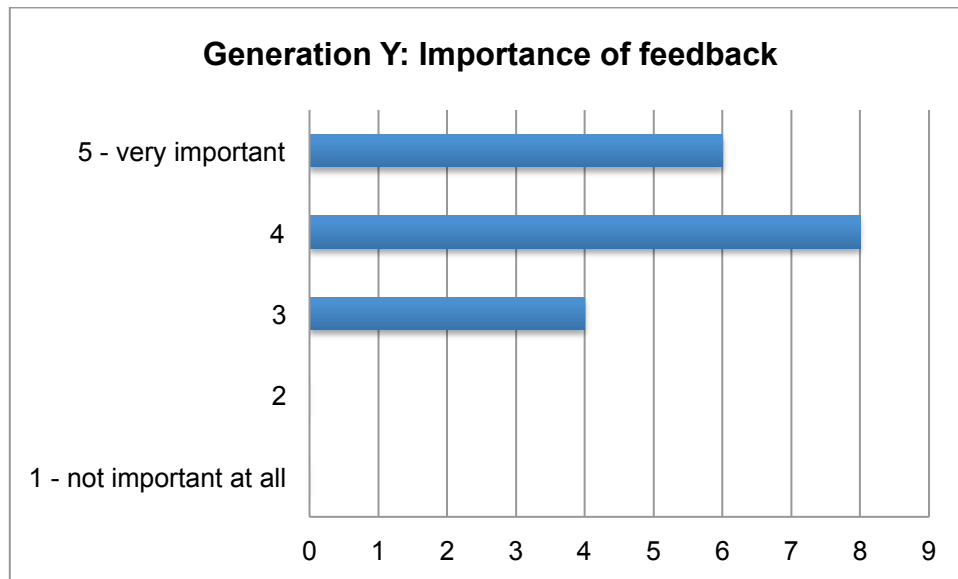


Figure 27. Generation Y: Importance of feedback.

The results suggest similar findings than the secondary data. The majority (almost 78%) of the respondents have rated feedback from their direct manager as important or very important. It is also notable that none of the participants reported feedback as a not important factor.

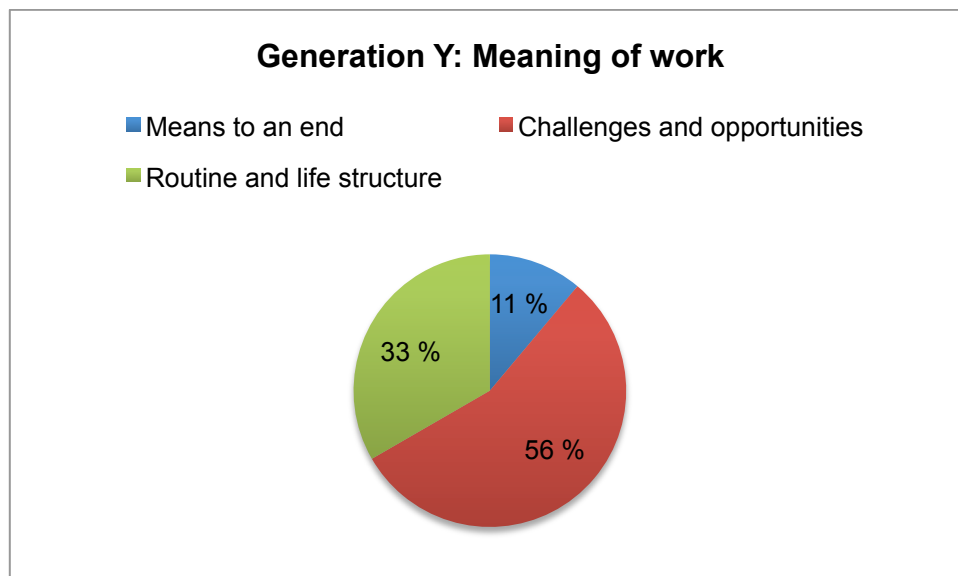


Figure 28. Generation Y: Meaning of work.

The generation Y provided similar results concerning the way they perceive work as the generation X: Majority of the respondents replied that work is considered as challenges



and opportunities. In contradiction with the table 1 (see page four), it appears that Millennials rather see work as challenges and opportunities or routine and life structure than as a means to an end.

Even if the results do not coincide with the secondary data, it is a relatively logical outcome, since the members of this age group are most likely just in the beginning of their careers and looking towards the future with optimism rather than considering work as a way to only provide for themselves.

#### 6.4 Comparative table

The main findings from the research from each question (Q) are gathered and presented in the table below.

Table 2. Results: Comparison between the three generations

	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Generation X</b>	<b>Generation Y</b>
<b>Important rewards (Q3)</b>	Recognition	Positive impact on others	Recognition
<b>Intrinsic or extrinsic rewards (Q4)</b>	Extrinsic & intrinsic rewards equally important	Extrinsic & intrinsic rewards equally important	Extrinsic & intrinsic rewards equally important
<b>(Q5)</b>	Free time	Money	Free time
<b>Preferred job characteristics (Q6)</b>	1. Job variety 2. Impact on others	1. Contribution to something 2. Job variety	1. Contribution to something 2. Job variety
<b>Working environment (Q7)</b>	Development-focused	Development-focused	Environment with strong team spirit
<b>Working alone or in a team (Q8)</b>	Both equally	Both equally	Both equally
<b>Importance of feedback (Q9)</b>	4 – important	5 – very important	4 – important
<b>Meaning of work (Q10)</b>	Routine and life structure	Challenges and opportunities	Challenges and opportunities

It is easily observed that the generations do have differences in terms of motivational factors, as well as in the characteristics according to the research conducted. They tend to consider different rewards important, appreciate different job characteristics, prefer different types of working environment as well as perceive the meaning of work differently. However, there are some unexpected similarities between the three.

For example, the results suggest that the feedback received from the direct manager is important for all of the generations. Furthermore, all of the generations appeared to appreciate teamwork and individual work equally. Finally, all of the generations appreciate intrinsic and extrinsic rewards equally, according to the results obtained.

## **7 Conclusions**

From the information gathered from the primary and secondary data, it appears to be unquestionable that Baby Boomers, generation X and generation Y have several different, prominent motivational factors as well as characteristics, based on their age group that appear more frequently among one generation than the other.

Even though it is important to keep in mind that no individual is the same and hence too strict generalization can lead to hurried conclusions and false assumptions, generalization is needed to some extent to be able to develop a wider understanding of the phenomenon in question. Therefore, the generalization should be understood rather as a representation of a phenomenon than the absolute truth.

The assumption based on the secondary data is that Baby Boomers are team players whom enjoy team work, value extrinsic rewards and recognition and do not appreciate feedback. The primary data obtained from the questionnaire mostly coincide with the assumption.

For example, recognition was chosen as the most important reward among Boomers. The alternative hypothesis formed based on the secondary data was that Baby Boomers value extrinsic rewards more than intrinsic rewards. Surprisingly, the findings from the survey did not coincide with the assumption; the results rather suggested that extrinsic and intrinsic rewards are equally important for the majority of the respondents in this age group. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis for the Baby Boomers was not accepted and hence the null hypothesis was not rejected.

On the other hand, generation X was described as independent and entrepreneurial generation who appreciate free time and freedom in their work environment. Based on the secondary data research, the alternative hypothesis was formed assuming that the generation X values intrinsic and extrinsic rewards equally. The results obtained from the survey coincided with the assumption; the majority of the members of generation X reported that intrinsic and extrinsic rewards are equally important. Therefore the alternative hypothesis was proven and the null hypothesis was rejected.

Moreover, generation Y was characterized as participative team players who have high expectations for recognition, rewards and constant feedback. It was to be expected that they considered work as a means to an end and meaningful work was highly appreciated. Based on these characteristics, the alternative hypothesis was formed expecting that the members of the generation Y appreciate intrinsic rewards over extrinsic rewards. According to the results of the survey conducted, generation Y appreciates intrinsic and extrinsic rewards equally. Hence the alternative hypothesis was not proven and the null hypothesis was not rejected.

As the research was mainly conducted to expand the knowledge of the author, these findings can be also useful for managers and leaders who are looking for ways to motivate the employees and hence improve their performance. Looking into the different motivation theories such as the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, one might find ways to identify and satisfy the emerging needs of the employees.

In addition, as the two dimensions theory of Herzberg suggests, even if the hygiene factors (dissatisfaction factors) are fulfilled, but motivation factors are not satisfied, the employees are presumably not highly motivated. Therefore the leaders should understand the importance and meaning of both of these factors in order to generate the desirable outcome.

The Acquired-Needs theory of McClelland introduces three different types of needs. However, one should be careful when generalizing people by their dominating needs since it might be that even if some people can be categorized more or less precisely to one of these groups, there are people who might have equal amount of the characteristics of each of the groups, and therefore cannot be categorized by just one of the groups.

Additionally, the expectancy theory of Vroom introduces an interesting idea about three different behavioural options that affect on the individual's decision-making process. If managers seek to influence valence, for example, they should find out what type of rewards the employees would prefer. Therefore, as the primary data suggest, in case of Baby Boomers, a good way to reward an employee in this age group could be giving him an extra holiday rather than a bonus in the next salary.

Once again, it should be kept in mind that no individual is identical and therefore even if majority of the generation prefers a certain thing to another, it is not certain that that conclusion is applicable to all of the members in the age group in question. Nevertheless, generalization and theory can create a good foundation for practice as well when applied accordingly.

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## The Questionnaire

# Work Motivation

Please answer to all of the questions below.

\*Pakollinen

1. In which year were you born? \*

- between 1965 and 1980
- between 1946 and 1964
- between 1981 and 2000
- Muu: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Are you male or female? \*

- Male
- Female

3. Please arrange the most important outcome to you achieved by work? (1 most important) \*

	1	2	3	4
Recognition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Title	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Positive impact on others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Salary	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. Are intrinsic (feelings and emotions) or extrinsic (status, physical rewards) rewards gained from work more important to you? \*

- Intrinsic rewards
- Extrinsic rewards
- Both equally

5. Please arrange by importance the following rewards, 1 being the most important. \*

	1	2	3
Money	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Free time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Power	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Arrange by importance the following job characteristics for you, 1 being the most important. \*

	1	2	3	4	5
Job variety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contribution to something	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Impact on others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Independent work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Performance feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. What type of working environment suits you the best? \*

- Development-focused
- Competitive Environment
- Environment with strong team spirit

8. Do you prefer to work alone or in a team? \*

- In a team
- Alone
- Both equally

9. How important is feedback from your direct manager to your work motivation? \*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very important

10. What does work mean to you in general? \*

- Means to an end (say, to cover the costs)
- Challenges and opportunities
- Routine and life structure