

Work commitment in the legal profession: a study of Baby Boomers and Generation Xers

JEAN E. WALLACE

Department of Sociology, The University of Calgary, Canada

ABSTRACT *Growing attention is being paid to the generational differences in the work orientations of professionals, particularly among Baby Boomers and Generation Xers. It is suggested that the role that work plays in one's life is the most significant generational difference, where Generation Xers are viewed as less committed to work, careers and employers than Baby Boomers. Most of this literature however is supported at best by anecdotal evidence rather than empirical data. This paper empirically addresses two questions: (1) are Generation X lawyers less committed to their work than Baby Boomer lawyers?; and (2) do the factors related to work commitment differ for Generation X lawyers and Baby Boomer lawyers? The regression results show there is no significant generational difference in work commitment. The generations do differ in the factors that are related to their work commitment however. Work effort and extrinsic rewards are generally more highly related to Baby Boomers' commitment and intrinsic rewards to Generation Xers' work commitment.*

Growing attention is being paid in the popular press to the generational differences in the work orientations of professionals, including doctors, nurses, accountants and lawyers. Two generations are the focus of this literature as they are the predominant ones in today's workforce—the Baby Boomers (or Boomers) and Generation X (or Gen Xers). Baby Boomers include the 40- and 50-something women and men born between 1946 and 1964, and Gen Xers include the 20- and 30-somethings born between 1965 and 1980.¹ This paper focuses on the generational differences in work commitment and work attitudes of a specific professional group, namely lawyers. Specifically, it sets out to answer two questions: (1) are Generation X lawyers less committed to their work than Baby Boomer lawyers? and (2) do the factors related to work commitment differ for Generation X lawyers and Baby Boomer lawyers?

In examining the generational differences in the work attitudes of lawyers, it is important to consider the social and historical contexts of the two generations. Boomers grew up during the Vietnam War, the Kennedy and King assassinations,

Address for correspondence: Jean E. Wallace, Department of Sociology, The University of Calgary, 2500 University Drive N.W., Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2N 1N4. E-mail: jwallace@ucalgary.ca

Watergate, Woodstock and the sexual revolution (Fay, 1993). The desirable work attributes of the Baby Boomers include positive work attitudes and a strong work ethic characterised by hard work, long hours and loyalty to their employers (Smola & Sutton, 2002; Southard & Lewis, 2004). Boomers, who are often the managers of Gen Xers, often depict the younger generation as slackers, disloyal, lazy, cynical, unfocused, materialistic, arrogant and self-absorbed (Jurkiewicz, 2000; O'Bannon, 2001).

Generation Xers are the children of Boomers who witnessed their workaholic parents being laid off and getting divorced which made them determined to maintain a balanced life. They grew up under conditions of family, financial and societal insecurity and rapid change. They are often referred to as the 'latch key' generation who grew up in situations where both parents worked and they relied on small groups of friends for support and television, personal computers and videogames for entertainment. The positive work attributes of Gen Xers are their practical approaches to problem-solving, their independence, creativity and innovativeness, their technical competence and their comfort with diversity, change and multi-tasking (Smola & Sutton, 2002; Southard & Lewis, 2004). They value flexibility and freedom to set their own hours, a sense of belonging in combination with independence and autonomy to work on their own, opportunities to learn new things, doing interesting, meaningful work that makes a difference to society, security, feedback, and work-life balance (Allen, 2004; Jurkiewicz, 2000; O'Bannon, 2001). They view Baby Boomers as overly cautious, competitive, blindly loyal and hierarchy worshipping (Flynn, 1996).

Younger Gen Xers are often viewed particularly harshly by their exceedingly dedicated Boomer colleagues and this also holds for lawyers. Boomers criticise the younger generation for their lack of involvement in their jobs, lack of commitment to their firms and careers and overall lack of work ethic. Boomers often describe Gen Xers as a generation who "couldn't care less" (Flynn, 1996). Titles such as "Xers vs. Boomers: teamwork or trouble?" (Flynn, 1996), "A new breed" (Carter, 2001) and "Retaining Generation X'ers in a Baby Boomer firm" (Fong, 2002) illustrate the concerns being raised in the literature in regards to the latest cohort of professionals. The general perception held by managers is that the work ethic has eroded and there has been a significant decline in the value and importance of work as indicated by the attitudes and behaviours of the Gen Xers (Jurkiewicz, 2000).

The following comments made by Gen Xer lawyers in an earlier interview stage of this project (refer to Wallace, 2002) explain their situation in contrast to previous generations:

All of my friends are in the same boat and that is, none of us is happy with work and none of us see ourselves here for the long term . . . None of us will be in this firm another five or six years from now . . . Women leave and have babies and don't come back and men leave and do other things.

I think it's a function of people today and my generation is different from my dad's and they were there for 25 years and are partners now. My friends have been to two or three firms in our first two years out of law school and we're looking for decent hours and decent pay and interesting work.

Why is it important to examine Baby Boomer and Generation X lawyers' work attitudes and experiences? First, most of the assumptions about the generations are supported at best by anecdotal evidence rather than empirical data (Shields & Shields, 2003). This study sets out to empirically document the work attitudes and experiences of Baby Boomer and Generation X lawyers. Second, as the Baby Boomer generation ages and retires, it is the Gen Xers who will be expected to fill these positions but this generation is much fewer in numbers than the preceding generation and they are assumed to be more concerned about work–life balance and quality of life. As Washburn notes with regards to physicians: “‘Work your butt off and make a lot of money’ may not attract applicants as it once did. Family time and balance between work and play may mean more to Gen-X physicians than large incomes” (2000, p. 56). The same can be said with regards to lawyers where Boomers are seen as placing a higher value on work itself than Gen Xers, and money and the golden ring of partnership are not the motivators they once were (Carter, 2001; Haserot, 2005; Shannon, 2000).

It has been suggested that the most rigid generational differences are related to the role that work plays in one's life (Kennedy, 2003) and as a result, Gen Xers are viewed as less loyal and committed to work, their careers and their employers compared to Baby Boomers (Carter, 2001; Fong, 2002). It is the perceived erosion of the work ethic and the widely reported decline in the value and importance of work that has been raised by managers as a critical concern with the attitudes and behaviours of the younger generation (Jurkiewicz, 2000). Whereas Boomers might define themselves as lawyers first, Gen Xer lawyers see practising law as part of their identity and perhaps not even the most important part of their identity. The Boomer generation is totally committed to law—it is who and what they are, whereas the Gen Xers define themselves as perhaps a lawyer, bird watcher, marathon runner and Girl Guide leader. This fundamental difference in how the generations define themselves results in Gen Xers placing greater emphasis on lifestyle choices and making sure they have more time for family, friends and leisure (Kennedy, 2003).

Hypothesis 1: Baby Boomers are more committed to work than Generation Xers.

In this study, several sets of correlates of Boomers' and Gen Xers' work commitment are proposed based on a review of the generation gap literature. First, the factors that Baby Boomers associate with being highly committed to one's work are examined in terms of work effort and earnings. Work effort is indicated by lawyers' workload, the average weekly hours they work at the office, the average weekly hours they work at home, and the extent to which they participate in extra professional activities outside of work time. Boomers are seen to equate working hard and long hours as evidence of being highly committed to their work and a high salary as a more important motivator for loyalty to one's job when compared to Gen Xers (Jurkiewicz, 2000).

Hypothesis 2: Greater work effort and earnings are associated with greater work commitment.

Hypothesis 3: Work effort and earnings are more strongly related to work commitment for Baby Boomers compared to Generation Xers.

Two different sets of variables are hypothesised to be correlated with Generation Xers' work commitment: flexibility and intrinsic rewards. Flexibility is examined in terms of the control lawyers have over when they work, the amount of flexibility in their work hours and their general perceptions of life balance. Gen Xers are believed to be more concerned about quality of life, life balance and leisure time than earnings when compared to Boomers (Jurkiewicz, 2000). Three factors relating to the intrinsic rewards of practising law are examined that include: challenging/interesting work, social significance of work, and good co-worker relations. Gen Xers are argued to be more concerned about having interesting, challenging work that makes a difference and that involves rewarding relationships with colleagues (Haserot, 2005).

Hypothesis 4: Greater flexibility and intrinsic rewards are associated with greater work commitment.

Hypothesis 5: Flexibility and intrinsic rewards are more strongly related to work commitment for Generation Xers compared to Baby Boomers.

In addition, six control variables were included to ensure that important theoretically relevant variables have not been excluded from the analysis. Related research has shown that these six variables are highly related to lawyers' work experiences and work commitment. They include several demographic variables (sex, marital status, presence of children), the extent to which their expectations regarding the practising of law have been met, the length of time spent practising law and whether or not they work in a large law firm.

Basically, it is expected that women, lawyers who are married, and lawyers who are parents will be less committed to the practice of law than men, lawyers who are not married and those who do not have children (Hagan & Kay, 1995). While much of the recent research on lawyers suggests that women are less satisfied with the legal profession and are leaving the profession in greater proportions than men (Brockman, 1994; Kay, 1997), other research suggests that women in law are just as satisfied or more satisfied compared to their male colleagues (Hagan & Kay, 1995; Mueller & Wallace, 1996). Marital status and presence of children are also included to see whether lawyers with family ties and obligations are less committed to work. The literature suggests that having familial commitments to a spouse and children exacerbate the difficulties of balancing one's work and non-work life, given the demanding nature of practising law (Epstein *et al.*, 1995; Stanford Law Project, 1982).

There is a considerable body of literature that suggests the perceived discrepancy between what an employee expects from a job and what he or she actually receives or experiences is highly correlated with job satisfaction and work commitment (Wallace, 2001; Kalleberg, 1977; Scarpello & Vandenberg, 1992). In this study, met expectations refers to the degree to which lawyers' expectations of the practice of law are met by their actual day-to-day work experiences. Those whose expectations are met are expected to be more committed to their work.

Lawyers' work setting is examined in terms of whether they work in a large law firm or not. The literature suggests that law firm practice represents the core of the profession, whereas working in other employment settings reflects the periphery

(Heinz & Laumann, 1982; Hull & Nelson, 2000). Large law firms hire the 'best and the brightest' lawyers who perform the most complex legal tasks that often involve significant economic transactions and have important implications for the practice of law in general. It is expected that those working in large law firms will be more committed to their work than lawyers working in other work settings. Profession tenure, or the number of years they have practised law, is also taken into account, where it is expected that the longer lawyers practise law the more committed they are to work.

Data and methods

All lawyers practising in the Province of Alberta were mailed a survey to their place of work in June 2000. The mailing list was obtained from the Law Society of Alberta and contains the names of all active members. Questionnaires were sent to 5,921 lawyers and 1,827 were returned, yielding a response rate of 31%.

Data provided by the Law Society of Alberta in terms of the gender and employment situation of all active members allow for comparisons between the provincial data and that of the sample. At the time of the survey, in the population, 67% of the men worked in law firms, 16% as solo practitioners, 9% in corporations and 7% in government. In the sample, 59% of the male respondents worked in law firms, 24% as solo practitioners, 9% in corporations and 7% in government. The computed chi-square test is 4.955 (3df; $p = 0.175$), which indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the distribution of male lawyers by work settings between the population and the sample data. Similarly, for women, the Provincial data show that 55% work in law firms, 15% as solo practitioners, 14% in corporations and 16% in government. The sample data are, respectively, 48%, 17%, 13% and 16%. The computed chi-square test is 1.229 (3df; $p = 0.746$), again indicating no statistically significant difference between the female lawyers by work setting between the population and the sample data. Based on the results of these comparisons, it is concluded that the sample data are representative of the population along these characteristics.

For the purposes of this paper, 1,283 lawyers are included in the analysis who work in law firms, corporations or government. Those working in solo practice or other work settings (e.g. independent contractors, consultants, university professors) are excluded from the analysis for the following reasons. One reason is because several important variables are not relevant when only one lawyer is involved (e.g. control over work hours, co-worker relations). Or, as in the case of university professors, they represent a very small proportion of lawyers and/or many are not practising law in their day-to-day jobs.

Measures

For most of the variables included in this analysis, Likert items from established scales were used to tap aspects of lawyers' work commitment, work effort, earnings, flexibility and intrinsic rewards. Unless otherwise indicated, the response categories

for these items are strongly disagree (coded 1), disagree (coded 2), neither agree nor disagree (coded 3), agree (coded 4) and strongly agree (coded 5). An '(R)' indicates that the item is reverse coded.

Generation (*Gen X* = 1) was coded 1 for lawyers born between 1965 and 1980 ($N = 443$) and 0 for the Baby Boomers born between 1946 and 1964 ($N = 840$). *Work Commitment* was measured by three Likert items that include: "I am very absorbed in my work"; "My work is a very important part of who I am"; and "I am deeply committed to my work" ($\alpha = 0.73$).

Work Effort is measured by four variables: workload, work hours (office), work hours (home) and extra professional activities. *Workload* is measured by four items from Caplan *et al.* (1975): "My workload is too heavy in my job"; "I have to work very quickly to get everything done in my job"; "I do not have enough time to get everything done in my job"; and "I often feel rushed in my job" ($\alpha = 0.80$). *Work Hours (Office)* is lawyers' self report of the average number of hours per week (including evenings and weekends) they work at the office. *Work Hours (Home)* is lawyers' self report of the average number of hours per week (including evenings and weekends) they work at home. *Extra Professional Activities* is the number of times a month respondents attend professional activities (e.g. related to business or client development, conferences, meetings or receptions) before 8:00 am, over lunch, after 6:00 pm during the month, or on weekends (day or night). It is coded 1 if less than once a month; 2 is once or twice a month; and 3 is more than twice a month. This measure taps the extent to which lawyers participate in social, work-related activities outside of regular working hours.

Earnings is measured by the natural logarithm of the total annual earnings from the practice of law for the 1999 tax year, before taxes and other deductions are made. The natural logarithm was used to reduce the extreme positive skewness of income and reduce the impact of outliers.

Work Flexibility is assessed by three variables: flexibility in work hours, control over work hours and work-life balance. *Flexibility in Work Hours* is measured by a single Likert item from Holtzman and Glass (1999): "It's very hard for me to take time off to take care of personal or family matters" (R). *Control over Work Hours* is measured by a single Likert item from Wallace (2004): "I have considerable control over when I work the hours I work". *Work-Life Balance* is measured by a single Likert item from Marks and MacDermid (1996): "In general, I feel I have a pretty balanced life".

Intrinsic Rewards are examined by three variables: challenging work, social significance of work and co-worker relations. *Challenging Work* is measured by the mean score of four Likert items that Ettington (1998) adapted from Smith *et al.* (1969): "The work I do in my job is challenging"; "The work I do is routine" (R); "The work I do is important"; and "I find the work I do allows me to be creative" ($\alpha = 0.79$). *Social Significance of Work* is measured by a single Likert item developed by Wallace (2004): "By practicing law, I feel I am making a difference in people's lives". *Co-worker Relations* is measured by four Likert items from Thomas and Ganster (1995) that asks: "When you talk about the stresses of your job, how much do the lawyers you usually talk to: listen to your work-related problems; empathize

with your stresses; offer support and encouragement; and show concern” ($\alpha = 0.88$). The response categories are: never (coded 1), not very often (coded 2), often (coded 3), and most of the time (coded 4).

The *Control Variables* are measured as follows. *Sex* (*Male = 1*) is coded 1 for males and 0 for females. *Marital Status* (*Married = 1*) is coded 1 for respondents who are living common law, cohabitating or married at the time of the study and all other marital statuses are coded 0. *Parental Status* (*Parent = 1*) is coded 1 for all respondents who had any children living at home with them at the time of the study and 0 for those who did not. *Met Expectations* is measured by a single Likert item from Wallace (1994): “Generally, practicing law is not what I thought it would be” (R). *Work Setting* (*Large Law Firm = 1*) is coded 1 for all lawyers who report they work in a law firm with more than 50 lawyers in their immediate office and 0 for all other employment situations. *Years Practising Law* is calculated by subtracting the number of years since the respondent was called to the Bar from the survey date.

Data analysis

Table 1 provides descriptive information about the Baby Boomer and Generation X lawyers included in the analysis. Table 2 contains the results from the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis that was used to answer the research questions presented above. The Pooled results in Table 2 allow us to answer Question 1, that is whether Gen Xers report the same degree of work commitment as Baby Boomers. We can also use these results to determine which variables are significantly correlated with work commitment for both Gen Xers and Boomers. To answer Question 2, OLS regression analysis, in conjunction with interaction tests, was used to determine whether the work experiences are similarly related to work commitment for both Gen Xers and Boomers. To assess this, OLS regression was used to estimate an equation for work commitment that included both Gen Xers and Boomers. These results are located in Table 2 and presented in the Pooled model. Then, this equation was re-estimated by including all of the determinants, a dummy variable for generation status and cross-product generation-interaction terms for each of the determinants (results not shown). The interaction terms that identify which regression coefficients differ significantly for Gen Xers and Boomers at the 0.05 level are also indicated in Table 2. We can then use these results to identify which determinants have significantly different relations for Gen Xers and Boomers. Because there are a number of significant interactions, OLS regression was then used to estimate the main effects of the determinants on work commitment separately for Gen Xers and Boomers (also presented in Table 2). This facilitates interpreting the similarities and differences in the correlates of work commitment for Generation X and Baby Boomer lawyers.

Examination of the zero-order correlations (available from the author) shows that none are above 0.60, suggesting that there are no collinearity problems among the exogenous variables. In addition, following Fox (1991) variance-inflation factors (VIF) were estimated for all of the variables included in the analysis. These results (available from the author) also indicate that multi-collinearity among the predictors is not evident for any of the variables.

Table 1. *Descriptive information for Generation X (N = 443) and Baby Boomer lawyers (N = 840)*

| Variable | Generation X | Baby Boomers |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| <i>Work Commitment</i> | 3.72 | 3.86*** |
| <i>Work Effort</i> | | |
| Workload | 3.51 | 3.53 |
| Work Hours (Office) | 49.99 | 46.46*** |
| Work Hours (Home) | 3.31 | 4.06** |
| Extra Professional Activities | 1.84 | 1.94*** |
| <i>Earnings (Ln)</i> | 10.99 | 11.60*** |
| <i>Work Flexibility</i> | | |
| Flexibility in Work Hours | 3.25 | 3.40** |
| Control over Work Hours | 3.24 | 3.57*** |
| Work–Life Balance | 3.33 | 3.42 |
| <i>Intrinsic Rewards</i> | | |
| Challenging Work | 3.77 | 3.81 |
| Social Significance of Work | 3.42 | 3.71*** |
| Co-worker Relations | 3.09 | 2.94*** |
| <i>Control Variables</i> | | |
| Sex (Male = 1) | 0.47 | 0.65*** |
| Marital Status (Married = 1) | 0.73 | 0.84*** |
| Parental Status (Parent = 1) | 0.27 | 0.72*** |
| Met Expectations | 1.07 | 1.08 |
| Work Setting (Large Law Firm = 1) | 0.27 | 0.38*** |
| Years Practising Law | 4.43 | 15.32*** |

Notes: * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Results

Table 1 contains the descriptive information for all variables included in the analyses that follow and shows how Generation X and Baby Boomer lawyers differ in their work experiences. First, while Gen Xers spend more time working at the office, Baby Boomers generally work more at home and are more involved in professional activities outside of regular work hours. Both groups of lawyers report similar workloads. Second, the results show that Boomers earn significantly more than Gen Xers, which should not be surprising since Boomers have, on average, over 15 years of experience practising law whereas Gen Xers have about $4\frac{1}{2}$ years of experience.

Boomers report greater flexibility in their jobs and more control over their work hours than Gen Xers and both groups of lawyers report similar amounts of work–life balance. This likely reflects generational differences in lawyers' career stages and positions of authority. Turning next to the intrinsic rewards, both groups of lawyers report that their work is challenging to the same degree, however, Boomers feel their work is of greater social significance whereas Gen Xers report better co-worker relations.

Lastly, the results for the control variables show that Baby Boomer lawyers are more likely to be male, married and parents than Generation X lawyers. As well, Boomers have considerably more experience practising law as indicated above and

Table 2. *Work commitment regression results for the pooled sample, Generation X (N = 443) and Baby Boomer (N = 840) lawyers*

| Variable | Pooled <i>b</i> (Beta) | Generation X <i>b</i> (Beta) | Baby Boomers <i>b</i> (Beta) |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Generation (Gen X = 1)</i> | -0.067 (-0.044) | — | — |
| <i>Work Effort</i> | | | |
| Workload | 0.135 (0.147) ^{***a} | 0.091 (0.097)* | 0.158 (0.175) ^{***} |
| Work Hours (Office) | 0.008 (0.126) ^{***} | 0.008 (0.108)* | 0.007 (0.123) ^{***} |
| Work Hours (Home) | 0.006 (0.049)* | 0.008 (0.047) | 0.005 (0.046) |
| Extra Professional Activities | 0.031 (0.034) ^a | -0.007 (-0.007) | 0.047 (0.055)* |
| <i>Earnings (Ln)</i> | 0.115 (0.111) ^{***a} | 0.109 (0.082)* | 0.113 (0.108) ^{***} |
| <i>Work Flexibility</i> | | | |
| Flexibility in Work Hours | -0.047 (-0.071) ^{***a} | 0.006 (0.009) | -0.070 (-0.109) ^{***} |
| Control over Work Hours | 0.029 (0.047)* | 0.018 (0.028) | 0.034 (0.057)* |
| Work-Life Balance | -0.037 (-0.051)* | -0.055 (-0.078)* | -0.033 (-0.045) |
| <i>Intrinsic Rewards</i> | | | |
| Challenging Work | 0.326 (0.291) ^{***} | 0.339 (0.293) ^{***} | 0.318 (0.290) ^{***} |
| Social Significance of Work | 0.148 (0.203) ^{***a} | 0.185 (0.250) ^{***} | 0.128 (0.175) ^{***} |
| Co-worker Relations | 0.095 (0.089) ^{***a} | 0.146 (0.118)* | 0.084 (0.084) ^{**} |
| <i>Control Variables</i> | | | |
| Sex (Male = 1) | -0.123 (-0.085) ^{***} | -0.109 (-0.073)* | -0.126 (-0.088) ^{**} |
| Marital Status (Married = 1) | -0.095 (-0.053)* | -0.130 (-0.078)* | -0.082 (-0.044) |
| Parental Status (Parent = 1) | -0.022 (-0.016) | 0.016 (0.009) | -0.039 (-0.026) |
| Met Expectations | 0.047 (0.071) ^{**} | 0.059 (0.084)* | 0.046 (0.072) ^{**} |
| Work Setting (Large Law Firm = 1) | -0.130 (-0.074) ^{***} | -0.095 (-0.057) | -0.128 (-0.071) ^{**} |
| Years Practicing Law | 0.001 (0.010) | 0.009 (0.036) | 0.001 (0.006) |
| <i>R</i> ² | 0.352 ^{***} | 0.331 ^{***} | 0.361 ^{***} |

Notes: **p* < 0.10; ***p* < 0.05; ****p* < 0.01.

^a Significant interaction at the 0.05 level.

are more likely to be working in a large law firm than Gen X lawyers. Both groups report that their expectations practising law have been met to the same degree.

Table 2 shows the regression results for the pooled sample, as well as for Generation X and Baby Boomer lawyers separately. Turning first to the pooled results, we see that, contrary to what was hypothesised, Generation X lawyers are not less committed to their work than Baby Boomer lawyers. There is no significant difference in their work commitment after taking into account their work effort, earnings, work flexibility, intrinsic rewards and the control variables. This finding challenges the assumptions regarding the generational gap in commitment that is prevalent throughout the literature and does not provide empirical support for Hypothesis 1.

The results also show that there are six significant interactions amongst the determinants of work commitment for Boomer and Gen Xer lawyers. This means that for six of the variables, their relationships with work commitment are significantly different for Gen Xer and Boomers. Consequently the regression coefficients for these six variables will be interpreted separately for the two generations of lawyers.

Starting first with the work effort variables, it appears that as hypothesised (Hypothesis 2), they tend to be positively associated with lawyers' work commitment. Lawyers who are more committed to their work tend to report heavier workloads and work longer hours at the office and at home. Two work effort variables, however, are significantly different in their associations with work commitment for the two groups of lawyers, namely workload and participation in extra professional activities. The results show that both work effort variables are significantly stronger in their positive association with work commitment for Boomer lawyers compared to Gen Xer lawyers, as predicted by Hypothesis 3. Specifically, workload ($b = 0.16$) has a stronger positive coefficient for Boomers than Gen Xers ($b = 0.09$) and extra professional activities has a significant positive coefficient for Boomers ($b = 0.05$) and a non-significant effect for Gen Xers ($b = -0.01$). Earnings was also hypothesised to have a positive association with work commitment (Hypothesis 2) and a stronger relationship for Boomers compared to Gen Xers (Hypothesis 3) and both hypotheses are supported by the results in Table 2. Thus, it appears that work effort and earnings are generally more important in understanding Baby Boomers' work commitment than Gen Xers'.

The results for work flexibility are somewhat mixed. First, it was hypothesised that lawyers would report greater commitment to their work if they had more flexibility, control and balance with regards to their work hours (Hypothesis 4) and that this would be more important to Gen Xers' work commitment than Boomers' (Hypothesis 5). Only control over work hours is positively related to work commitment, thus not much support is provided for Hypothesis 4. Instead, according to the results, greater flexibility in hours and greater work-life balance are associated with less work commitment. There is, however, a significant interaction for flexibility, which suggests that flexibility is not related to work commitment for Gen Xers ($b = 0.01$) but significantly and negatively related for Boomers ($b = -0.07$).

The results for intrinsic rewards are generally more consistent with the hypotheses posed in this paper. First, all three rewards are positively associated with work commitment for both groups of lawyers (Hypothesis 4). That is, more challenging work, more socially significant work and better co-worker relations are associated with greater work commitment. Second, for two of the intrinsic rewards, the relationships are stronger for Gen X lawyers compared to Baby Boomer lawyers, thus offering support for Hypothesis 5. That is, the social significance of work has a significantly stronger positive relationship with work commitment for Gen Xers ($b = 0.19$) compared to Boomers ($b = 0.13$), as does co-worker relations ($b = 0.15$ and $b = 0.08$, respectively).

Lastly, there are several significant findings for the control variables. Men appear less committed to work than women, which is consistent with the literature that shows that women generally enjoy their jobs more than men (e.g. Hagan & Kay, 1995; Mueller & Wallace, 1996). Married lawyers are less committed to work, whereas there is no significant difference in parents' versus non-parents' commitment levels. The more lawyers' expectations regarding the practice of law have been met, the more committed they are to their work, as predicted. Lawyers who work in large law firms are less committed to work than those working in other employment settings and years of experience has no association with work commitment.

Discussion and conclusions

While growing attention has been paid to the generational differences in the work orientations of professionals, there has been little research conducted that empirically demonstrates the extent to which Baby Boomers and Generation Xers actually differ in their work attitudes and experiences. The purpose of this paper was to answer two questions: (1) are Generation X lawyers less committed to their work than Baby Boomer lawyers? and (2) do the factors related to work commitment differ for Generation X and Baby Boomer lawyers? Survey data were used to test hypotheses regarding the relationships between work effort, earnings, work flexibility and intrinsic rewards and work commitment for the two generations of lawyers.

Contrary to the anecdotal reports in the literature, the results of the regression analysis show that Generation X lawyers are just as committed to their work as Baby Boomer lawyers. It appears, however, that while the two generations share similar degrees of work commitment, there are several important differences in the factors associated with their commitment to work.

In general, it appears that several aspects of work effort and earnings are more important in understanding how committed Baby Boomers are to their work than Generation Xers. Specifically, the results of the interaction tests show that, as predicted, greater workload, more involvement in professional activities and higher pay are more important to Baby Boomers' work commitment and much less important to Generation Xers' work commitment. As well, intrinsic rewards have different relationships to work commitment for the two generations. As hypothesised, a sense that one's work is socially important and having supportive colleagues are more important to Generation X's work commitment than to that of the Baby Boomers. This pattern of findings suggests that employers of the two generations might consider different strategies in motivating Gen Xers and Baby Boomers. For Baby Boomers, it appears that the extrinsic reward of pay is more important whereas for Generation Xers it appears that the intrinsic rewards of socially significant work and good co-worker relations are more important. It should be noted, however, that all three of these rewards (earnings, socially significant work, and co-worker relations) have significant positive associations with both generations' work commitment, even though they differ significantly in the strength of the relationships that they have for Gen Xers and Boomers.

There are also several variables that have similar associations with work commitment for both generations of lawyers. For both Gen Xers and Boomers, the more hours they work at home and at the office, the more committed they are to their work. It appears that for both generations then, working long hours is an indicator of their work commitment. In addition, the more challenging their work, the more committed they are and this variable is the most important correlate of work commitment for both generations. Professional work is generally regarded as intrinsically challenging and rewarding, since it allows professionals to apply special skills and knowledge required for less predictable, routine situations (Greenwood, 1957; Larson, 1977). This appears to be a particularly important work reward for lawyers from both generations.

Several findings were inconsistent with the hypotheses posed in this paper. The work flexibility variables were hypothesised to be positively related to work commitment (Hypothesis 4) and more important to Gen Xers' commitment (Hypothesis 5). Only control over work hours was positively related to work commitment for both generations—the more control they have over when they work the hours that they do, the more committed they are to their work. It was argued that if workplaces offered greater flexibility and more opportunity for a balanced life style, lawyers would be more committed to their work, but this does not appear to be the case. Instead, when their work is more amenable to achieving a balanced lifestyle, lawyers are less committed to their work. Flexibility in work hours had different associations with work commitment for the two generations—it was negatively related for Boomers and has a non-significant association for Gen Xers. Perhaps lawyers who can take advantage of the flexibility in their work hours are less committed along the same lines as those who are achieving a more balanced life. This pattern of findings is likely discouraging for employers who are attempting to offer more family-friendly work places to their employees with the hopes of enhancing their job satisfaction and loyalty.

In closing, several limitations of this investigation suggest future avenues of research in the study of generational differences in work attitudes. One limitation of this study is that it focused on only one generational difference in terms of the specific work attitude of work commitment. Future research may consider examining other attitudinal and behavioural differences that relate to work, such as how the generations differ in their pride in their work, their readiness to adopt new technologies, etc. For example, this study lacks measures of lawyers' work performance. As well, the findings involving the indicators of work effort examined in this study, which may be interpreted as indirect indicators of performance, are inconclusive in this regard. The Gen Xers reported working longer work hours at the office whereas the Boomers reported working longer hours at home and participating in more extra professional activities outside of regular work hours. Work commitment may be the same for both generations, but we do not have data on whether lawyers from the two generations differ in their work performance. Following expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), while Boomers and Gen Xers may be equally committed to work in that the strength of their work valence is comparable, we have not examined the extent to which they differ in the perceived effort–reward probability (expectancy) that they will be rewarded. Based on the generation gap literature, it seems reasonable to hypothesise that Gen Xers are less likely to expect that their effort will result in the desired rewards for their performance, whereas Boomers are more likely to expect they will receive the desired rewards for their performance and therefore exert greater effort than Gen Xers. Klammer *et al.* (2002) made similar arguments about different factors motivating Boomers and Gen Xers to participate in the same activities. They examined the willingness of the two generations to speak up and make constructive suggestions in the workplace, that is, members' civic virtue. They found that the two different generations engage in civic virtue for different reasons, where being heard is considerably more important to Baby Boomers than Gen Xers in predicting civic virtue.

A second limitation of this study is that it relies on cross-sectional data. Historically, each older generation complains about the work ethics and values of the younger generation. This leads to the question as to whether each generation is actually lazier than the last or whether individuals become more conscientious and hard working as they age and mature? This question highlights the need for longitudinal data in sorting out generation versus maturation effects. Smola and Sutton (2002) attempted to address this issue for Baby Boomers and Generation Xers and concluded that work values are more strongly influenced by generational experiences than an individual's age and maturation. Moreover, their results suggest that, contrary to what they expected, as individuals age they place less importance on work, show less company loyalty and are less likely to view their self worth as being tied to their job. It remains important, however, that future research attempt to study the generational gap in work values and attitudes over individuals' life course as individuals age and mature.

In addition, longitudinal data would also allow for stronger causal inferences to be made about the relations among the variables examined in this paper. Some of the variables hypothesised to be related to work commitment included in the regression analysis may be outcomes of commitment rather than predictors. It is important to note, however, that this model was derived from the factors identified in the literature that are often assumed to be associated with or indicators of Boomers or Gen Xers' work commitment. That is, the time lawyers spend at work is interpreted by others to be an indicator of work commitment, regardless of whether working long hours leads one to be more highly committed or being more highly committed leads one to work longer hours. A more accurate model of work commitment requires a longitudinal approach to disentangle the causes from the outcomes, as well as document possible changes in work commitment over the life course and career stages as mentioned above.

Third, the measure of the generational membership was based on a single indicator based on the individual's birth year. While this limited approach to tapping generational membership is effective in demonstrating the differences between the two generations, it assumes that the generations are homogenous in their work orientations and experiences. As well, those born close to the cusp of the generation cut offs may share characteristics of the other or both generations. A clear indicator of the heterogeneity within the generations is the different distributions of several of the demographic variables, such as gender, marital status and parental status. Future research may consider examining the extent to which other factors interact with the generational differences in influencing work attitudes and behaviours.

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Note

- [1] There is considerable discrepancy throughout the literature as to the exact years that encompass the Boomers' and Gen Xers' birth years. Some report that the Baby Boomers were born anywhere from 1940 to 1946 and ending in 1960 or 1964 and there is even less agreement about the Gen Xers' birth years that may begin somewhere in the early 1960s and end in 1975, 1980, 1981 or 1982 (Smola & Smith, 2002).

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