Abstract

Friendship studies in the workplace have been conducted, but little research has been done on how generations are relating to each other in the workplace. Developing relationships in the workplace benefit individuals and employees in a variety of ways (Sias & Cahill, 1998; Berman, et. al, 2002), but how does it happen, which factors matter most? In developing friendships, interpersonal literature suggests that perceived similarity is a primary predictor of friendship development (Sias, 1998; Brehm, 1985; Holladay & Kerns, 1999; Green, 2005). However, organizations are currently employing more individuals of all ages. As multiple generations are interacting with one another in the workplace, organizations must look at ways to adapt to these changing demographics. With this new challenge, questions about employee interaction arise regarding how generations communicate with one another in the workplace.

Research Question

How do perceptions of similarity affect cross-generational relationships in the workplace?

Previous Findings

Friendship and Acquaintance Relationships
- Friendships are voluntary, mutual, and often communal with concern about each other’s welfare regardless of benefits gained
- Acquaintance groups consist of limited familiarity and contact among members
- People are drawn to relationships based on perceived similarity

Learning Organizations
- Learning organizations encompass open communication, risk taking, support and recognition for learning, teams, and training
- Social capital utilizes relationships within the social structure of the workplace to establish a learning organization

Cross Generational Relationships
- Friendships are more likely to develop among individuals similar in age
- The number of interactions that younger workers have with older workers, significantly, positively affects their beliefs about older workers
- Generations differ in their communication styles, expectations, work styles, attitudes, comfort with technology, and their views regarding loyalty and authority

Peer Relationships and Mentors
- Intergenerational peer relationships fulfill advice giving or caretaking functions rather than socio-emotional functions
- Mentoring relationships in the workplace assist career development

Methodology

Research Sample
- Mid-size, Midwestern University students ages 18-24
- All participants are part of the Millennial generation
- Participants have held a part or full time job within the previous year

Interpersonal Attraction Scale
- McCroskey and McCain (1974)
- Identifies three dimensions of interpersonal attraction: social, task, and physical
- Measures attraction towards older co-worker of relatively equal employment status

Perceived Homophily Measure
- McCroskey, Richmond, and Daly (1975)
- Seven-point semantic differential scale representing four dimensions of homophily
- Measures perceived similarities between co-workers of relatively equal employment status

Current Findings

At this time this project is pending further data accumulation
- More data is needed in order to determine whether or not there is a correlation between the two measures in age groups 30-39, 40-49, and 50 and over
- For age group “30 and under” homophily and perceived measures are significantly and positively related. The graph below measures data collected thus far from 142 surveys among respondents in age group “30 and under”

Acknowledgements

Dr. Martha Fay, Communication Research Seminar
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Differential Tuition