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# The occupational work ethic of student workers : a generational approach

Margaret Anne Gribbin

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Margaret Anne Gribbin entitled "The occupational work ethic of student workers : a generational approach." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Human Resource Management.

Gregory Petty, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

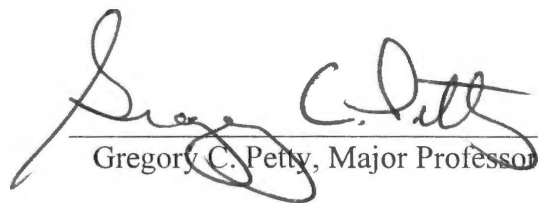
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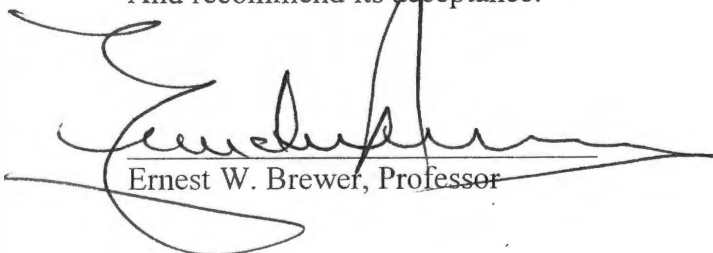
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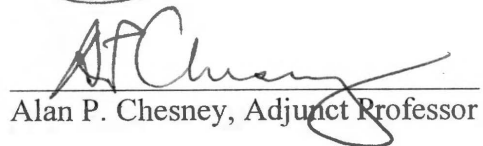


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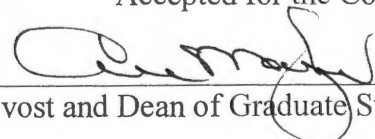


Ernest W. Brewer, Professor



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Accepted for the Council:



Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

The Occupational Work Ethic of Student Workers:  
A Generational Approach

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Science Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Margaret Anne Gribbin  
May 2003



Thesis  
2003  
.G75

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## Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate the occupational work ethic of student workers at The University of Tennessee from a generational approach. The purpose of this study was to establish baseline data establishing the occupational work ethic of student workers and to identify demographic trends within the sample. Once identified, this information provided The University of Tennessee with insights into the work ethic of student workers. This comprehensive understanding of the work ethic may lead to more effective student worker services, such as tailored training initiatives.

The subjects in this study were students who were enrolled in courses and employed part-time by The University of Tennessee during spring semester 2002. The Occupational Work Ethic Inventory (OWEI), designed by Petty, was used to determine the occupational work ethic of the subjects. The OWEI examines work ethic in three subscales: (a) interpersonal skills, (b) initiative, and (c) being dependable.

Means, standard deviations, correlations and frequency counts were the descriptive statistics methods used to analyze responses to the numeric research questions. A multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to analyze the continuous demographic information as determined by the independent variables. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to investigate the three subscale categories. The results indicated a significant relationship between the occupational work ethic subscales and gender. Females tended to have significantly higher score than did males for two of the three subscales. No significant relationships were found between the occupational work ethic and various demographic variables.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

“There is a problem in the workplace. It is a problem of values, ambitions, views, mind-sets, demographics, and generations in conflict” (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000, p. 9). Generational differences can lead to misunderstanding in the workplace, and although there is no concrete formula to relieve the intra-generational differences, a basic understanding of these differences could help alleviate workplace anxiety.

There are currently four generations in the workplace: Veterans, Baby Boomers, and Generation Xers with the first wave of workers from the Net Generation entering the workforce. Researchers have conducted countless studies exploring each generation, telling their stories, and exposing the strengths and weaknesses of each (Hagevick, 1999; Hicks & Hicks, 1999a; Howe & Strauss, 2000, Zemke et al. 2000). However, some researchers suggested that as the Net Generation enters the workplace they could change the nature of the work, much like Generation X and the Baby Boomers before them (Howe & Strauss; Wallace, 2001; Zemke et al.). The Net Generation “workers will transform the workplace, just like the workers from the generations before them. They will bring remarkable technical skills, a strong entrepreneurial outlook, a deep-seated social conscience, and, like every ‘new’ generation, a healthy dose of questioning and change” (Wallace, p. 192).

In a time when the “American Values” work ethic of the Veterans is a distant memory and Generation Xers wait for the aging Baby Boomers to retire and vacate upper level positions, the next generation of American workers are graduating from college ready to take their place in the workforce. The Net Generation “has the capacity to

become America's next great generation....They represent an opportunity that, once fully understood and appreciated, must be acted on by people of all ages" (Howe & Strauss 2000, p. 28). More technology savvy than generations before, the Net Generation is guaranteed to transform the workplace.

#### Rationale

As the Net Generation enters the workforce, much like the Baby Boomers and Generation Xers before them, they will transform the workplace with their different views and approaches to work. Managers must have the ability to work effectively with the Net Generation and to help ease their transition into the workforce. "Identifying and understanding generational personalities can be tremendously valuable, especially to managers. This knowledge can help us empathize, communicate, and motivate – in short to be better managers" (Raines, 1997, p. 34).

Examining the occupational work ethic of each generation will help managers better understand their employees and may help them identify weaknesses within or between groups. Understanding the work habits of each generation will also help organizations identify training needs ahead of time, which will further help to alleviate workplace tension and anxiety creating a more productive work force. For example, if researchers find that members of Generation X lack interpersonal skills, training programs can be initiated to help members of this generation develop these lacking skills.

#### Statement of the Problem

As the Net Generation enters the workplace they will transform the demographic make-up of the workforce. The literature often referred to concerns the human resource development specialists have regarding the Net Generations integration into the



workforce. Lack of information lends support for the determination of the occupational work ethic of the Net Generation as compared to other age groups. This information should enable managers to better integrate this group into the workplace.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to compare generational differences in the occupational work ethic of student workers and to identify demographic trends within the sample. It is expected that this information will lead to a better understanding of the interactions of workers across generations. This information also will provide employers of student workers with insights into their work ethic. A comprehensive investigation of the work ethic should lead to more effective student worker services, such as tailored training initiatives.

#### Research Questions

This study focused on the identification and assessment of the occupational work ethic of university student workers. Primarily, generational differences were examined.

To provide direction for this study the following research questions were posited:

1. Is there a significant difference in the occupational work ethic of student workers across generations (Net Generation, X generation, Baby Boomers, and veterans)?
2. Are there salient factors of demographic characteristics that provide insight into improving training initiatives for more effective student worker services?

#### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided this study. Hypotheses are stated solutions to problems that identify relationships between variables. It was the goal of this study to accept or reject the following hypotheses.

1. There is no significant difference between the years of work experience and the occupational work ethic.
2. There is no significant difference between the student's course load and the occupational work ethic.
3. There is no significant difference between the number of hours worked weekly and the occupational work ethic.
4. There is no significant difference between the student's age and the occupational work ethic.
5. There is no significant difference between participation in the work-study program and the occupational work ethic.
6. There is no significant difference between the student's class level and the occupational work ethic.
7. There is no significant difference between the student's gender and the occupational work ethic.
8. There is no significant difference between the student's parent's education level and the occupational work ethic.
9. There is no significant difference between additional off-campus employment and the occupational work ethic.
10. There is no significant difference between the student's financial responsibility for school and the occupational work ethic.

#### Assumptions

The following assumptions guided this study. These are facts that are assumed to be true and are not under the control of the researcher.

1. It is assumed that all respondents will honestly respond to items on the Occupational Work Ethic Inventory (OWEI).
2. It is assumed that respondents are student workers employed by The University of Tennessee.
3. It is assumed that the OWEI is an effective tool to determine the occupational work ethic of the research sample.

## Limitations

The following limitations pertain to this study. They are provided to identify the factors that could affect this study, but were not under the control of the researcher (Mauch & Burch, 1998).

1. The results of this study apply only to The University of Tennessee student workers enrolled in Spring 2002 classes.
2. The results of this study are limited to the student workers' responses to the OWEI.

## Delimitations

The following delimitations pertain to this study. A delimitation is a factor that could affect the study and is under the control of the researcher (Mauch & Birch, 1998).

1. The population of 1,920 student workers enrolled in Spring 2002 classes at The University of Tennessee.
2. The occupational work characteristics include only those examined in the OWEI.

## Operational Definitions

The following operational definitions pertain to this study. They are provided to specifically define the language used throughout. This definition of terms narrows the scope of the study and provides a common understanding of the language used.

1. **Baby Boomers:** Individuals born between 1946 and 1964 (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a).
2. **Cohort:** Members of a generation who are linked by their formative years and experience history at similar ages (Hagevik, 1999).
3. **Generation:** "A cohort group whose length approximates the span of a phase of life and whose boundaries are fixed by a peer personality" (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 429).

4. **Generation X:** Individuals born between 1965 and 1976 (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a).
5. **Net Generation:** Individuals born between 1977 and 1997 (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a).
6. **Occupational Work Ethic Inventory (OWEI):** An inventory deigned to determine an individual's occupational work ethic.
7. **Student Worker:** An individual enrolled in a minimum of 12 undergraduate credit hours who is employed by The University of Tennessee and works a maximum of 20 hours a week.
8. **Work Ethic:** "A belief that work itself is important and that doing a good job is essential" (Cherrington, 1980, p. 19).
9. **Veteran:** An individual born before 1946 (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a).

## Research Methodology

### *Subjects and Sample*

Because of the high concentration of young adult employees, the population for the study was selected randomly from 1,920 student workers at The University of Tennessee enrolled in Spring 2002 courses. According to Gay and Airasian (2000), simple random sampling is the best way to establish a representative sample. Gay and Airasian stated that a sample size of 320 was appropriate for a population of approximately 1,900 members.

### *Instrumentation*

The Occupational Work Ethic Inventory (OWEI) was distributed to establish the occupational work ethic of the Net Generation (Appendix B). "The OWEI measures occupational work ethic by the use of simple one-word descriptors, is easy to understand and administer, quick to complete . . . and discriminates work ethic through the OWEI

subscales” (Hatcher, 1995, Instrumentation section, ¶ 1 ). Hill and Rojewski determined that the OWEI was an accurate indication of a student’s work ethic (1999). Developed by Petty (1995), the instrument uses the stem “ at work I can describe myself as” and is followed by a 7-point Likert-type scale. Items on the inventory include “descriptors that represent key work ethic and work attitude concepts” (Hill & Rojewski, Purpose of the Study section, ¶ 2).

### Summary

Chapter I provided an introduction to the study. The following chapters detail the specifics of the research project with a review of current literature, research methodologies, data analysis, and a discussion of the findings for this study.



## Chapter II

### Review of Literature

This chapter provides a review of current literature as it pertains to this study. Included in this chapter is an overview of generations and generational differences, a discussion focusing on work ethic theories and on the knowledge gap concerning the Net Generation and their occupational work ethic.

#### Generations

“Understanding generational differences is critical to making them work for the organization and not against it. It is critical to creating harmony, mutual respect, and joint effort where today there is suspicion, mistrust and isolation” (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 17). A workplace consisted not only of the tools used to get the job done, but also of the people who complete those jobs, and individuals upbringings and histories influence the way they work and relate to others (Zemke et al).

To identify a generation, Howe and Strauss (2000) suggested looking at three attributes “(1) perceived membership in a common generation; (2) common beliefs and behaviors; and (3) a common location in history” (p. 41). They claimed that there was not a solid line that divided one generation from the next, and even within generations there were distinct cohorts that further divided the generation into smaller, more distinct groups. “There are no hard stops or road signs indicating when one generation ends and the next begins.... but the specific affections of a generation’s formative years do bind them together in exclusive ways” (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 3).

Researchers did not agree on the exact time span of a generation but did agree that a generation is defined by the events that took place when the cohort came of age (Hicks

& Hicks, 1999a; Howe & Strauss, 2000, Raines, 1997; Zemke et al., 2000). The coming of age moment “separates the dependence of youth from the independence of adulthood” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 61). This coming of age time was a distinct period marking the transition from childhood into adulthood and created a “set of collective behavioral traits and attitudes” that shape and continue to influence the generation throughout its lifecycle (p. 32).

### *Generation Diagonal*

Strauss and Howe (1991) conceptualized that generations occurred in cycles. Examining the passage of time, a generation’s age location and life stage at social moments in history revealed and defined a generation. This generational diagonal illustrated the passage of time and is explained by examining the four generation types, age location, life stages and social moments, all of which influenced the way people reacted to events and made history.

*Generation types.* Strauss and Howe (1991) identified four generation types that recurred throughout history. “Generations come in cycles. Just as history produces generations, so too do generations produce history” (p. 35). This pattern not only established a tool for understanding the past, “but also [a tool] to forecast how the future of America may well unfold over the next century” (p. 34). Occurring in a fixed order throughout time, the four generation types are Idealist (dominant, risk-taking), Reactive (recessive, risk-taking), Civic (dominant, institution builders), and Adaptive (recessive, risk adverse). The way a generation reacts to events is influenced by their age and by their generation type when the event occurred (Table 1).



Table 1.

*Generation Type Cycle*

<b>Generation</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Birth Years</b>
GI	Civic	1901-1924
Silent	Adaptive	1925-1942
Baby Boom	Idealist	1943-1960
Generation X	Reactive	1961-1981
Net Generation	Civic (?)	1982 -

Adapted from *Generations: the history of America's future, 1584 to 2069*, by W. Strauss and N. Howe, 1991, p. 74. NY: Quill William Morrow.

*Age location.* Strauss and Howe (1991) further divide generations into cohort groups, which implied a permanent and involuntary membership in a group as determined by an individual's birth year. A cohort group was unique because members shared a common "age location in history" and "always encounter the same national events, moods, and trends at similar ages" (p. 48). Every cohort group was uniquely affected by historical events which formed "a sense of collective identity and reinforces a common personality" (p. 49).

*Life phase.* Turner and Helms (1995) identified eight life stages. However, for the purposes of identifying a generation, Strauss and Howe (1991) identified four phases of life, as displayed in Table 2. The age of an individual during historical events and his or her central role in society further defined how that individual would react to an event. The four life phases are; (a) elderhood, (b) midlife, (c) rising adulthood, and (d) youth.

Individuals within a generation share a common phase in life and interpret events through their common role in society (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

*Social moment.* Social moments played critical roles in determining the evolution of generations. A social moment is defined as “an era typically lasting about a decade, when people perceive that historic events are radically altering their social environment” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 71). Altering about every 40 to 45 years are two types of social moments: secular crises and spiritual awakenings. Secular crises focused on changing public institutions and behaviors, whereas spiritual awakenings focused on personal values and behaviors. Each generation reacted differently to social moments (Strauss & Howe).

“We must remember that an age of each generation is rising while time moves forward” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 34). As previously stated, each generation shared a distinct period of history, common views and behaviors, and perceived membership. Establishing generation types and patterns in which they occurred offered

Table 2.

*Life Phase*

<b>Life Phase</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Central Role</b>	<b>Values</b>
Elderhood	66-87	Stewardship	Passing on values
Midlife	44-65	Leadership	Using Values
Rising Adulthood	22-43	Activity	Testing Values
Youth	0-21	Dependence	Acquiring Values

Adapted from *Generations: the history of America's future, 1584 to 2069*, by W. Strauss and N. Howe. 1991. p. 60-61. NY: Quill William Morrow.

“an approximate calendar and itinerary of major changes America can expect” (p.34).

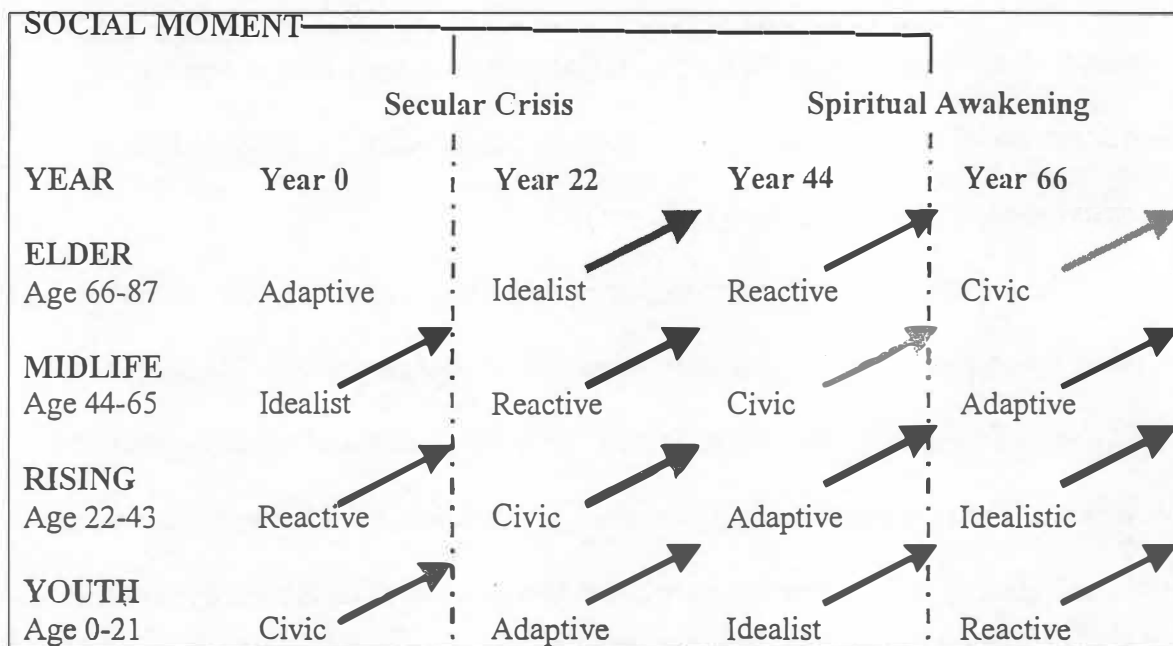
The generational diagonal illustrated the passage of time, social moments, and the repetitive cycle of generation types (Figure 1).

The four elements required to define a generation included the generation type cycle, age location, life phase, and social moments. According to Howe and Strauss (1991), establishing the patterns over time unveiled the generational trends for the future of America. The generational diagonal was only one formula for defining a generation. Hicks and Hicks (1999a) divided people into generations based on the passage of time and on changes in value development.

### *Generational Values*

According to Hicks and Hicks (1999a), values differences were the basis for generational divisions. Examining lifestyles in different decades revealed moments in history where certain values are passed on from one generation to another. A dominant value shift marked the birth of a new generation. “Our values guide our lives. They give us direction, are the basis for decision-making, and help us make choices” (p.12).

*Value development.* Massey (1979) identified three stages of value development: (a) imprinting, (b) modeling, and (c) socialization. What a child experienced from birth to approximately seven years of age was imprinting. At this stage the child accepted various experiences and considered them normal (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a). The second stage, modeling, “is the most significant . . . because it is the stage when a child begins to make his own value decisions” (p.15). From age 7 to 13, the child looks for heroes and role models to admire and aspire to be. Socialization takes place from 13 to the early 20s.



Adapted from *Generations: the history of America's future, 1584 to 2069*, by W. Strauss and N. Howe, 1991, p. 75. NY: Quill William Morrow.

Figure 1. Generational diagonal.

Note: The generational diagonal illustrates the generational type cycles with the passage of time. The current youth, aged zero to twenty-one, are members of a civic generation. Members of a civic generation tend to be protected youths born after a spiritual awakening, who overcome a secular crisis as they come of age. They unite as rising adults, become powerful midlifers, and face a spiritual awakening as elders. Today's youth follow this pattern closely. Born after the spiritual unrest of the 1970's, they are protected children (as evidenced by an increase in child-focused political issues) and are currently coming of age during a secular crisis (September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks on the United States). Although the future is uncertain, it appears the generational diagonal is an accurate indicator of trends to come (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

During this final stage of value development, adolescents are significantly influenced by their peers and “start making choices about what kind of people they will become and what they want to do in life” (p. 17).

Values development is significant when categorizing people by generations “because each decade is unique, those who grow up in a particular decade develop values that are different from those who grow up during other decades” (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a, p. 42). Children who were in the values development stages were influenced more by and viewed events differently from adults who had the ability to filter the event through their established value system (Hicks & Hicks). Historical events shape the values that are passed to each generation. The experiences and value development of younger generations are fundamentally different from those of older generations (Massey, 1979). Hicks and Hicks divided people by generation by exploring the historical context of each decade and categorized by comparing the values similarities within decades.

The 1920s. The 1920s were a time of growing prosperity. There was a significant increase in school attendance, urban population growth, automobile ownership and the life expectancy. Women won the right to vote, and the first women were elected to serve in the U.S. Senate. Ford introduced the 40-hour work week, and the popularity of both movies and radio soared. The population was patriotic, and wholesome family values were stressed (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a).

The 1930s. Feeling the effects of the stock market crash in 1929, the 1930s opened with soaring homelessness, hopelessness, and with a significant number of Americans struggling for survival. The population had tremendous faith in the government and in Roosevelt’s efforts to lift the country out of the Great Depression.

Home-centered family entertainment like Monopoly and Bingo became popular, along with cigarette smoking, Shirley Temple movies, and radio shows. People in the 1930s sought financial security and instilled a sense of patriotism in their children (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a).

The 1940s. World War II engulfed the 1940s, and there was a surge of patriotism with the population looking to the government for leadership. In the spirit of Rosie the Riveter, women entered the workforce. Industry and productivity soared, leading to economic growth and to increased disposable incomes. Cars, appliances, and televisions were popular. Spock revolutionized childcare. This decade exemplified “the good life”, pulling together for the common good, and the rise of technology (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a).

The 1950s. With both a population boom and economic growth, automobile and home sales flourished in the 1950s. The National Highway Act promoted increased travel to national parks. Church attendance grew, and women voluntarily returned to housekeeping and child rearing. Televisions were commonplace and significantly influenced the children of the 1950s. Society focused on the children. The popularity of suburbs grew quickly, and television became the single greatest influencing factor on the value development of children (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a).

The 1960s. The 1960s was a turbulent decade giving rise to civil rights laws, feminism, and contraceptives. This decade was engulfed with youth questioning the values of their parents and of the government. Major accomplishments of this decade included medical advances, the lunar landing, and a rise in attendance at institutions of higher education (marking the first time children were more educated than their parents).

Martin Luther King marched on Washington DC, Vietnam protests were plentiful, and millions witnessed via television the assassination of a president. Citizens of that decade learned to question authority and to protest the government (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a).

The 1970s. A significant decrease in family values began in the 1970s. The number of unmarried couples living together increased, along with day care centers and single parent households. Distrust of the government grew after the Kent State riot and the Watergate scandal. Protests against the Vietnam War increased along with support for environmental causes. The energy crisis and the integration of the school systems led to the mistrust of the government. People shifted their efforts from working for the common good to focusing on themselves and on what made them happy (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a).

The 1980s. According to Hicks and Hicks (1999a) the eighties began with a declining economy and soaring inflation. The deterioration of the family continued, followed by a wave of child-focused research such as the impact of child abuse, drug use, and working mothers. Latchkey children returned from school to empty homes and MTV. AIDS, drug use, gang violence, smoking and an increase in suicide rates illustrated that decade of declining values. Self-absorbed parents instilled few values in their children.

The 1990s. Single parent households and unmarried couples living together increased in the nineties. Minorities and homosexuals lobbied for legal status. Health care and child safety issues topped legislative agendas, and a nation fought the spread of AIDS and other STDs. Rapid growth of the Internet played a significant role in children's lives, as did the increase of school violence. The full impact of values development on the youth of that decade has yet to be seen. However this decade of the over-scheduled family reared children who thrived on technology and tolerance (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a).

To define a generation, Hicks and Hicks (1999a) grouped decades that embraced similar values because “individuals with similar values may find themselves thinking and behaving in compatible ways, even if other differences...exist” (Lee, Dougherty, & Turban, 2000, Similarity of Work Values section, ¶ 1). Often split into two groups, Hicks and Hicks combined the GI Generation (born between 1901 and 1924) and the Silent Generation (born between 1925 and 1945) to include individuals born before 1946 who were children in the 1920s and 1930s. These generations survived two world wars, had faith in the government, and are referred to as the Builder Generation because “they were the architects of our traditional family-oriented value system” (Hicks & Hicks, p. 230). Children of these decades learned character and discipline from strong family units. As adults they tended to be patriotic, and according to Hicks and Hicks assumed key government and industrial leadership positions throughout the country.

The 76 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964 experienced the good life as overindulged children. They are named the Baby Boomers. Children of the late 1940s to early 1960s grew up focusing on their personal needs, and as adults believe that the rules do not apply to them. The value shift from focusing on the needs of others to focusing on personal needs divided the previous generation from the Baby Boomers (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a).

A dramatic drop in the birth rate from 1965 to 1977 signified the arrival of Generation X, a blanket title, that illustrated the general angst of the generation. Children born in the mid-1960s to late 1970s grew up during difficult financial times in deteriorating families. As adults they tended to be unsure about the future, to feel abandoned by their parents, and to be defensive. (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a).



The final and largest generation to date was the Net Generation, born between 1977 and 1997. These are the first children to grow up entirely online, which will be the defining element of that generation. After witnessing the hopelessness of Generation X, the Net Generation's Baby Boomer parents reverted to the traditional child rearing techniques of their parents. Children born in the late 1970s to late 1990s had protective and controlling parents. That strong family unit marks a dominant value shift from the latchkey children of Generation X (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a).

Although the specific years used to define generations have varied, the theories have focused on shared experiences, the importance of childhood events, and a collective sense of membership. For this study, the generational categories identified by Hicks and Hicks (1999a) are used to identify trends and patterns (Table 3).

It is important to understand each generation, its influences, and its impact on the workplace. "The values we develop in our youth are the foundation for what we believe as adults. Understanding this concept is the most important tool in identifying why people of different generations value things differently" (Hicks & Hicks, 1999b, Roots of Generational Tension section, ¶ 11). It would be impossible to describe a generation without comparing it to the generations that preceded and followed it. "Their past, present, and future. Each tense helps illuminate the whole picture. You can't understand who Boomers or Gen Xers are or were if you have no idea where they came from or where they hope to go" (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 28). Therefore, a general overview of each generation's prominent influences is provided to aid understanding and to compare with those of the Net Generation.

Table 3.

*Generational Divide*

<b>Generation Name</b>	<b>Birth Years</b>	<b>Age 2001</b>	<b>Population 2000</b>
Veterans	Born before 1946	55 and older	56 million
Baby Boomers	1946 –1964	54 - 37	76 million
Generation X	1965 – 1976	36 - 25	44 million
Net Generation	1977 - 1997	4 - 24	80 million

Adapted from *Boomers, Xers and other strangers: Understanding the*

*generational differences that divide us*, by R. Hicks & K. Hicks, 1999a. Wheaton, IL:

Tyndale House Publishers.

*Veterans*

Affectionately described by Tom Brokaw (1998) as “the Greatest Generation,” Veterans were born before 1946. This generation was composed of two cohort groups, the GI Generation and the Silent Generation, because they shared common values (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a). This generation has seen its share of hard times, living through the Stock Market Crash of 1929, the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor and World War II. Their childhoods were shaped with heroes like Superman, Babe Ruth and Joe DiMaggio (Zemke et al., 2001).

This generation defined “America” values, and have been described as hard working, dedicated, patient, respectful, confident, obedient, and honorable (Zemke et al., 2001). They have endured and flourished, forming the foundation of the modern day work ethic. According to Zemke et al., the Veteran’s workplace motto is “an honest day’s

work for an honest day's pay" (p. 47). They derived "satisfaction from the work itself" (p. 48) and at this stage in their lives have no desire to climb the corporate ladder.

This generation has had tremendous faith in the government and has believed in pitching in for the common good. They are dedicated and driven and have accepted "key leadership positions all across the country" (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a, p. 240). The Veterans' impact will be felt for generations through the hierarchy and bureaucracy they established. They also will live on through stereotypes and comparisons with future generations.

### *Baby Boomers*

Born between 1946 and 1964, Baby Boomers were the largest generation in the workforce, with numbers topping off at 76 million. Their parents, who struggled through the Great Depression and World War II, "wanted their kids to have better and happier childhoods than they had" (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a, p. 243). Milestones in their lives included the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Martin Luther King's march on Washington DC, the assassination of President Kennedy, Vietnam, and Woodstock. Heroes from their childhood included John Glenn and John and Jackie Kennedy (Zemke et al., 2001).

"The generation was powerful from the beginning, its members becoming trendsetters for the rest of society" (Raines, 1997, p. 26). Growing up in the economic boom after World War II, Baby Boomers were optimistic and dedicated. They faced work with a "you can have it all" attitude and defined themselves through their work (p. 49). They are dedicated and driven, often feeling personal satisfaction from 50 and 60 hour workweeks (Zemke et al., 2001).

Baby Boomers were the first generation whose values were defined by the television. "TV watching became an ingrained part of our American culture and shaped our beliefs, attitudes, and actions" (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a, p. 245). As children, during critical stages of development, that generation watched the lunar landing, Elvis Presley on the Ed Sullivan Show, and the assassination of President Kennedy. "The medium had quickly become the most powerful communication technology available" (Tapscott, 1998, p.19).

Between Baby Boomers and their Veteran parents, there was an extensive gap in values, attitudes and actions. Baby Boomers worked to "redefine roles and promote equality, left unfulfilling relationships to seek more fulfilling ones, sought immediate gratification, and manipulated the rules to meet their own needs" whereas Veterans "followed traditional roles, were loyal (to their marriages and their companies), were willing to be disciplined and patient, waiting for their rewards, and played by the rules" (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a, p. 70). Baby Boomers wanted personal fulfillment and believed they could achieve it through successful business practices (Hicks & Hicks).

According to Raines (1997), the Baby Boomer's impact on the workplace was immense. They wanted their voices heard, and they were the driving force behind "participative management, flattened pyramids, employee development programs, quality circles, team building and empowerment" (p. 28).

### *Generation X*

"Xers grew up in the shadow of the Boomers and, like the middle child, passively resisted anything the elder sibling embraced" (Zemke et al., 2001, p. 93). That generation of "slackers" and "twentysomethings" included people born between 1965 and 1976. As

with generations before, Generation X is defined by shared historical events such as Women's Liberation, Watergate, personal computers, the Challenger disaster, and Operation Desert Storm. They grew up playing with Cabbage Patch dolls and Transformers, watching television shows like "The Simpson's" and "The Brady Bunch" (p. 97).

Generation X was the first to be sent to preschool and to day care centers. They returned home after school to empty houses and were commonly referred to as latchkey children (Murray, 1997). Generation Xers grew up in deteriorating families and, according to Hicks and Hicks (1999b), were skeptical and defensive and felt abandoned. Contrary to this negative image, that generation tended to be self-reliant, to welcome diversity, to be global thinkers, and to seek balance and informality (Zemke et al., 2001). Generation Xers were skeptical, and financially savvy, desired balance, were reluctant to commit, and had blurred life-stage boundaries (unsure of where adolescence ends and adulthood begins). They are not impressed by titles, were technologically proficient, and have been ethnically diverse (Raines, 1997).

Generation X also has been associated with a weak work ethic. However, according to Zemke et al. (2001) they just had a different way of processing information and required freedom regarding how and when work gets accomplished. Despite the negative assumptions about the work ethic of Generation X, Turner-Henry's (1997) research revealed the similar work ethic attributes of Baby Boomers and Generation X. The research showed that "there was not a significant difference in the work ethic among employees categorized by age, Baby Boomers and Generation X" (p. 39). However, unlike Baby Boomers, Generation Xers do not get their identity from their work and are

less willing to spend long hours in the office (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a). “It’s not that Generation X lacks work ethic. It’s just that they’ve witnessed firsthand a work ethic that eats people up and spits them out – and they want something different” (Raines, 1997, p. 46).

### *Net Generation*

The Net Generation “are unlike any other youth generation in living memory. They are more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 4). Born between 1977 and 1997, defining moments for that generation included the rise of technology, the Oklahoma City bombing, the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal, and the massacre at Columbine High School. Admiring role models like Michael Jordan, Mia Hamm, Tiger Woods and Bill Gates, the Net Generation had exposure to, and acceptance of many different cultures (Zemke et al., 2001). Members of the Net Generation have been influenced largely by technology and have been described as confident, team-oriented, achieving, conventional, accepting, and special all the while changing the face of education and the workplace

*Confident.* Members of the Net Generation shared a global orientation, were realistic about career advancement opportunities and about the need for higher education (Alch, 2000b). Eighty-seven percent of respondents to the Generation 2001 Survey revealed that the Net Generation “believe that their college education prepared them for the real world” (Retrieved from Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company Website). They were resilient group who believed that they could achieve their dreams through hard work and goal attainment (Howe & Strauss, 2000). “Today’s kids believe in the future and see themselves as its cutting edge” (p. 10).

*Team-oriented.* The Net Generation tended “to use a blend of collaboration, interdependence, and networking to achieve their ends” (Alch, 2000a, Full Text section, ¶ 12). Their educational focus has been on group learning, has been further solidified by their increased participation in organized sports (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Much like the Veterans, members of the Net Generation are likely to pull together and work toward a common goal.

*Achieving.* Murray (1997) observed that the popularity of soccer with the Net Generation illustrated their parents’ obsession with helping them achieve because, unlike other sports, almost everyone could play soccer, and the rules were easy to follow. Homework and group projects also have become family efforts guaranteeing success for the child. “Success is being bred into them every step of the way” (Enter the Millennials section, ¶ 5).

*Conventional.* According to Howe and Strauss (2000) the Net Generation were comfortable with their parents’ values as evident through decreasing drug use and violence. They tended to be social, optimistic, confident and moral with a sense of civic duty not evident since the Veterans Generation. More than 90% of respondents of the *Generation 2001 Survey* (2000) felt “that helping others was more important than helping oneself” (Retrieved from Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company Website). Although it was too early to tell, some predications stated that this generation would rally around violent crime, further cementing their place in history (Zemke et al., 2001).

*Accepting.* The Net Generation are accepting of untraditional family configurations and tend to have a much more positive relationship with their parents than Generation X. “This generation thinks that their parents are cool” (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a,

p.275). The emergence of popular boomer icons like Twinkies, Slinkies, bell bottoms, lava lamps, and beaded doorways form a bridge closing the entertainment gap between the Net Generation and their parents (Zemke et al., 2001).

Multiculturalism is commonplace for the Net Generation. They are the most tolerant of all generations and are accepting of a diversity of races and religions (Zemke et al., 2001). Technological advances such as chat rooms and email allowed the Net Generation the opportunity to converse with people around the world increasing global awareness (Dorman, 2000).

*Special.* The Net Generation is “the most watched over generation in history” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 9). Buttons proclaiming members of the class of 2000 were distributed to kindergartners and their parents in 1982. Child safety issues have topped political agendas, and children are increasingly sheltered from tobacco, alcohol and drugs as parents fight for warning labels on movies, music, and television shows (Murray, 1997). This is the first generation of planned pregnancies; and they have the confidence of knowing they were wanted (Zemke et al., 2001).

*Changing education.* According to Hicks and Hicks (1999a), educational researchers believed that “the high use of computers from an early age is actually changing the way these young people think. It’s having an effect on how they collect and analyze information” (p.280). Barna (1995) identified a shift from linear learning to mosaic learning. Today’s youth process information by randomly investigating numerous points before synthesizing and evaluating. “Mosaic learning permits faster processing and greater absorption of information than does a linear pattern” (p.40). The impact of digital



media on the way people learn is forcing educators to rethink education practices.

Tapscott (1999) identified eight shifts for interactive learning:

1. from linear to hypermedia....
2. from instruction to construction and discovery....
3. from teacher-oriented to learner-oriented....
4. from absorbing material to learning how to navigate and how to learn....
5. from school to lifelong learning....
6. from one-size-fits-all to customized learning....
7. from learning as torture to learning as fun....
8. from teacher as transmitter to teacher as facilitator.... (Eight Shifts of Interactive Learning section, ¶ 1).

*Technology savvy.* “Not only is the Net Generation more populous than the previous generation, it is also the first to grow up exclusively in the digital age” (Alch, 2000b, Full Text section, ¶ 3). The shift from adult-controlled passive broadcast media to the interactive options available by digital media is the cornerstone of the Net Generation. “It should not surprise us that the generation which first grows up with this new medium is defined by it” (Tapscott, 1998, p. 3).

According to the *Generation 2001 Survey* (2000), 100% of college seniors are connected to the Internet, and eight out of ten respondents claimed that the Internet was their main source for news and information. Kennedy (2001) considered this generation ‘communication junkies’ who saw cell phones and pagers as necessities. “The Net Generation is lapping Boomers in their ability to use computers and their level of comfort with them” (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a, p. 279). According to Tapscott (1998), “society has

never before experienced this phenomena of the knowledge hierarchy being so effectively flipped on its head” (p. 36).

*At work.* Much like the Baby Boomers, the size of the Net Generation could be expected to force the workplace to change to suit their needs and work styles (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a). Based on the Net Generation’s school record and how they related with others, Hicks and Hicks predicted that members of the Net Generation were “going to have a highly networked, high tech work style” (p. 302). According to Tapscott (1998), the traditional organizational models would not work in an “economy driven by innovation, knowledge, immediacy, and internetworking” (p. 210). Garrison (2000) claimed that the Net Generation understood and would tolerate corporate structure but that they had a desire to participate and to receive recognition for work on important projects.

Similar to Veterans are Net Generation’s desires to work together to benefit the whole and to assume responsible jobs. And much like the Baby Boomers, they have a sense of adventure and a desire for fun. Technology and media obsession bond the Net Generation and Generation X. But unique to the Net Generation is their tolerance for diversity and their fear of what the future could hold (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a). “This new wave of workers is both optimistic about the future and realistic about the present. They combine the teamwork ethic of the Boomers and the can-do attitude of the Veterans and the technology savvy of the Xers.” (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 143).

Each generation is influenced by the historical context in which they grew up, and even with the passage of time a generation and its stereotypes live on through comparisons with other generations. The Net Generation is believed to exhibit “old

country” work ethic of the Veterans, desire for fulfillment on the job similar to that of the Baby Boomers, and the technological workplace of Generation X (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a). The generational theories and the defining values of each generation are categorized in Table 4 as a comprehensive generational comparison.

### Work Ethic

Applebaum (1998) stressed the importance of work and defined work ethic as the belief that work was the center of moral life and that it was beneficial to the individual, the family and the community. According to Applebaum, changes in technology and in social conditions ultimately influenced work and the way work is accomplished. Hill (1996) agreed, stating that just as the industrial revolution brought about economic and social changes, “the people of the late twentieth century experienced tremendous cultural and social shifts with the advent of the information age” (Work Ethic in the Information Age section, ¶ 1).

The Protestant Ethic stated that work was a sacrifice and a means to moral righteousness. However, with the rise of the Information Age, work is now “perceived as good and rewarding in itself” (Hill, 1996, The Work Ethic in the Information Age section, ¶ 4). That rise in technology and the changing nature of work was redefining the American work ethic (Applebaum, 1998). According to Rothman (2000), the nature of work drastically changed in the 1960s when “work became a much more powerful reflection of status than accomplishment at precisely the moment that it became easier to make money without creating anything tangible” (Meanings from the Concept of Work section, ¶ 1). The trend from emphasis on work to refocusing on the self continued

through the 1970s and 1980s (Juriewicz & Brown, 1998). “It appears that America’s work ethic is changing from working hard to working smart” (Leonard, 2000, p. 224).

Occupational work ethic has been a cornerstone of generational identification. Phrases like American values, bottom-line driven, and work-life balance have identified the collective work ethic trends of Veterans, Baby Boomers and Generation Xers. Personal values, which influence work ethic, are developed during childhood and form the foundation of an individual’s work ethic on the job. “The work ethic is a product of our cultural heritage, upbringing, and fundamental value system” (Juriewicz & Brown, 1998, Age Cohort and Work Ethic section, ¶ 4). The section will explore the childhood influences of the Net Generation and the development of work ethic through part-time employment.

### *Childhood Influences*

According to Cherrington (1980), “The values of adults are largely shaped through childhood experiences” (p. 119). To continue, “Not since the Progressive Era has America greeted the arrival of new generation with such a dramatic rise in adult attention to the needs of children” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 21). It is expected that the work ethic of the Net Generation could resemble that of the Veterans, as stated by Howe and Strauss (2000). The Net Generation has “a solid chance to become America’s next great generation” (p. 5). The development of an individual’s value system determines how that individual relates to others, and how that individual performs on the job (Massey, 1979). As defined by Massey, values were “subjective reactions to the world around us...that automatically

Table 4.

*Generation Comparison*

	<b>Veteran</b>	<b>Baby Boomer</b>	<b>Generation X</b>	<b>(Assumed) Net Generation</b>
<b>Generation Type</b>	Civic Adaptive	Idealistic	Reactive	Civic
<b>Current Life Phase</b>	Elderhood	Midlife	Rising Adulthood	Youth
<b>Social Moment</b>	Coming of age during a secular crisis, entering elderhood during a spiritual awakening	Youths after secular crisis, comes of age during a spiritual awakening, as elders face a spiritual awakening	Youths after a spiritual awakening, enter midlife during a secular crisis	Coming of age during a secular crisis, entering elderhood during a spiritual awakening
<b>Central Role</b>	Passing on values	Using values	Testing values	Acquiring values
<b>Defining Values</b>	Needs of country Hierarchy Allegiance Save Money Buy with cash Radio Automobile Hard Work Duty Work Fast Law and order	Needs of community Consensus Self-discovery Buy it now Buy with credit Television Personal Fulfillment Optimism Work Efficiently Humanistic	Needs of adults Competence Self-reliance Want it now Struggle to buy Computer Uncertainty Personal Focus Eliminate the Task Competitive	Needs of Children Interdependence Goal setting Get it now Buy online Internet What's Next? On my Terms Do exactly what's asked Team-oriented

Adapted from *Understanding generational differences helps you manage a multi-age workforce* by C. Alexander, 2000. Retrieved from:

[http://www.digitaledge.org/monthly/2001\\_07/genzap1.htm](http://www.digitaledge.org/monthly/2001_07/genzap1.htm)

Boomers, Xers and other strangers, by R. Hicks and K. Hicks, 1999b. *Focus on the Family*. Retrieved from: <http://the.milll.org/boomersxers.htm>

*Millennials rising: The next great generation*, by N. Howe and W. Strauss, 2000. NY: Vintage Books;

The boomers' kids get a job: Their resumes are gilded, but the 'echoes' may be a drag on the economy, by N. Neusner, P. Basso, S. Brenna. and I. Lobert, I., 2001. *U.S. News and World Report*, 131 (8), 28-30;

*Beyond generation X: A practical guide for managers*, by C. Raines, 1997. Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Publications.

filter the way we view most things” (p.4). Values, which contribute to the development of an individual’s work ethic, are developed during youth in three stages: imprinting, modeling, and socializing. Imprinting occurs from birth to approximately age seven. The child observes the world and absorbs values patterns that form a foundation of adult behavior patterns. During imprinting, the child was introduced to, and accepted societal norms. From age 7 to 13, the child begins to apply the values learned during the imprinting phase. He or she searches for role models and heroes that reinforce their values. The adolescent has increased contact with individuals outside the family that makes this stage of values development critical because values are absorbed from a wide range of models. Modeling is the “most important factor in establishing our personality, standards and goals” (Massey, p.12). The final stage of values development, socializing, takes place from age 13 to the early 20s. Teenagers tend to socialize with people who have similar interests and values, which reinforce their values systems. Young adults might test their values systems through experimentation, but they eventually return to the original values learned as children.

Additional elements that influence values development include family, friends, religion, education, media, geographical roots, and technology. However, examining where an individual was, and what happened when he or she was 10 provides an indication of his or her values system (Massey, 1979). College-aged members of the Net Generation were 10 between 1987 and 1994. That was immediately (a) after the explosion of the Challenger, (b) in a time of increasing economic uncertainty, (c) increasing environmental concerns as a result of the Exxon Valdez oil tanker dumping millions of gallons of oil off the Alaskan coast, (d) the intense media coverage of the

wars in the Persian Gulf and of Desert Storm, (e) the devastation of Hurricane Andrew, and (f) the O. J. Simpson arrest and televised trial (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a).

#### *Parent's Influence Developing Work Ethic*

Research conducted by Cherrington in 1975 revealed six common childhood themes of outstanding performers at work. The themes focused on understanding the importance of (a) discipline and obedience, (b) work, (c) religion, (d) doing the “right thing”, (e) frugality, and (f) individual efforts. The research showed also that children learned these skills from watching their parents’ work, working with their parents, or by being supervised by them (1980). “Parents who demonstrate a strong work ethic tend to impart a strong work ethic to their children” (Hill, 1996, Influences Shaping the Contemporary Work Ethic section, ¶ 2).

A study conducted by Galambos and Sears (1998) explored the relationship among (a) adolescents’ perception of their parents’ work conditions, (b) the work relate effect, (c) adolescents’ respect for parents’ work and (d) the influence on the adolescents’ work values. Galambos and Sears hypothesized that through the parents’ perceptions of work, the adolescents’ perceptions of their parents’ work and the adolescents’ respect for their parents’ work influenced the development of the adolescents’ work values. The children showed a common understanding of their parents’ jobs and work conditions and respected their parents’ jobs more when the job was “less depersonalizing, less straining, and more satisfying” (Discussion section, ¶ 2). The researchers were unable, based on adolescents’ and parents’ perceptions of the job, to predict conclusively the youths’ work values. It was discovered, however, that a positive father-adolescent relationship “enhances the consistency between qualities present in the father’s work situations and

adolescent's work values" (Adolescents' Perceptions of Parents' Work and Adolescents' Work Values section, ¶ 9). Data also revealed that adolescents sought a balanced home life and work. This study revealed that a child's perceptions and observations of his or her parents' jobs influenced the child's work values.

#### *Part-time Employment and the Developing Work Ethic*

Early development had a huge influence on establishing personal values, but according to Cherrington (1980) managers played a large role teaching employees the value of work. "The principles involved in the development of positive work values are taught in their environment" (p. 16).

The United States Department of Labor (2000) conducted a longitudinal study on the relationship between youth employment and educational attainment. A total of 12,686 men and women born between 1957 and 1964 were interviewed annually until 1994 and are still interviewed biannually. Those workers revealed that 80% that were born between 1962 to 1964 and that they worked during high school. Those who were age 16 and 17 years old who worked 20 or fewer hours a week were more likely to earn college degrees. A larger percentage of participants who worked while in high school had greater work experiences through age 30 (United States Department of Labor). This study affirmed the importance of early work experiences in developing positive employability skills.

Taylor (1996) researched the influence of adolescent employment on the development of the occupational work ethic. A total of 353 respondents completed the questionnaire and 16 in-depth interviews were also completed. It was concluded that there were aspects of adolescent employment that positively influenced the development of a positive work ethic, including (a) purposeful work that matched the student's skills,



talents, and desires, (b) high levels of activity, (c) supportive bosses that acted more like mentors, (d) trust, (e) decision-making authority, (f) working with peers, and (g) flexible schedules.

Watson (1993) explored the self-perceived work ethic of high school students and found no significant differences between gender, grade level and work status between the work ethic of general education and tech prep students. The sample had a limited number of respondents who worked over 11 hours a week. However, as the number of hours worked per week increased so did the mean score of the subscales indicating a relationship between employment and the development of positive employability skills. Although no statistically significant differences were established between the occupational work ethic and grade level, 12<sup>th</sup> graders had the highest mean score on three of the four subscales.

Allender's (1993) research revealed similar trends regarding the relationship between work and positive work values. The OWEI was distributed to Vocational Students in East Tennessee, and 3,282 surveys were returned. Freshman had the lowest mean scores with a gradual increase to seniors, who had the highest mean scores. The respondents' responses indicated that 35.6% of them worked 11 hours or more per week. Mean scores for the subscales for dependable, ambitious, and cooperative increased as the number of hours worked weekly increased. Gender differences also were noted; women scored higher than men did on every subscale item.

The separation of education and work was a the subject of a long-standing philosophical discussion. Corporations believed that the education system, focusing on theory, did not properly prepare students for the workplace, whereas educators believed

that the corporations were not forthcoming enough in identifying desired skills workers needed or in providing student internships (Cherrington, 1980). However, each acknowledged the importance of the other. Cherrington identified three theories concerning the relationship between education and work: (a) “education improves the quality of work, (b) work improves the quality of education, and lastly that (c) work and education are both facilitated by the development of positive work values” (p. 121).

“Work experiences for young people significantly contribute to the development of self-discipline and maturity” (Cherrington, 1980, p. 219). Balancing work and school forced students to manage their time and activities and gave them a “greater appreciation for education” and money (p. 207). Even though an individual’s childhood influenced personal values, employment was essential to developing work values.

### Knowledge Gap

The Net Generation is just coming into its own. With the oldest members of the cohort graduating from college and moving into the workforce, it is unclear how this generation will impact the workplace. To be effective, managers must know what to expect and how best to manage and inspire this group of workers. Until now, managers have had only theories and speculations. The distribution and analysis of the OWEI to current workers of the Net Generation could assist managers in managing more effectively the workers of tomorrow. By working with the developmental theory of work values, that positive work values are established through a combination of education and work, managing student workers could be the first logical step in identifying the work ethic of the Net Generation.

It will be up to human resource leaders and organizational development professionals to lead their companies to understand the organizational needs, motivations, and behaviors of the Net Generation which has a different outlook, culture and values than the previous two generations (Alch, 2000b, Full Text section, ¶ 22).

“ The consequence of change to a computer and information dominated society is that work and work ethic is being redefined” (Ablebaum, 1998, p. 131). Identifying the occupational work ethic of the Net Generation is the first step toward understanding their needs in the workplace.

#### Summary of Review of Literature

Popular culture and literature have identified theories focusing on the different work ethics of people from different generations. Some researchers identified values shifts as the reason for different approaches to work (Hicks & Hicks, 1999a) whereas, other researchers look for trends and cycles to divide people into generations in an attempt to explain differences (Strauss & Howe, 1991). This study focused on identifying demographic trends to explore the work ethic of members of different generations.

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## Chapter III

### Research Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed outline of the research methods and procedures utilized to accomplish the research objectives. Items involved include the population and selection of the sample, the basis for the selection of the research instrument, dependent and independent variables, data collection procedures, and methods of data analysis are described at length in this chapter.

#### Population and Sample

The population of the study was 1,920 student workers employed by The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. To minimize mailing costs, the employees were surveyed via the campus mail system. Student workers are classified as part-time employees, working approximately 20 hours a week. The students work at the Knoxville campus location, which includes all administrative and academic colleges and departments, the Agriculture Experiment Station, the Agriculture Extension Services, Veterinary School, Municipal Technical Advisory Service, the Institute for Public Service, University Wide Administration, and University Relations.

According to Gay and Airasian (2000) approximately 20% of the total population over 1,500 is sufficient for determining the sample size for the study. The on-campus student worker population at The University of Tennessee was 1,920. Therefore a sample size of 320 was appropriate for the population. To assure that that number is collected, a total sample of 480 student workers were surveyed for this study (Gay & Airasian).

Simple random sampling uses a table of random numbers to select individuals for the sample. Each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected.

“Random sampling is the best way to obtain a representative sample” (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 124). With random sampling, inferences could be made to the total population from the sample results (Gay & Airasian). Therefore, simple random sampling was used for this study.

To obtain a listing of the population for the study, The University of Tennessee’s University Wide Computing Center printed labels for the total population of student workers at the Knoxville campus locations. There were approximately 160 sheets of labels with 12 labels per page, or approximately 1920 names. To obtain the sample, three labels from each page were selected using a random number table to determine the participants to be used in the study. This process raised the total number of student workers who received the OWEI from the suggested sample size of 320 to 480.

Using Gay and Airasian’s (2000) random number table, the number 89,415 was selected as a starting point (p. 606). The researcher systematically scrolled through the numbers choosing the first three numbers that had last two digits between 00 and 12. The numbers 30,506, 76,305, and 44,104 were the numbers randomly provided by the table. Therefore, using the last two digits of the numbers randomly selected (06, 05, and 04,), the forth, fifth and sixth label from each page was selected as the random sample for the study.

Once the sample was selected, each name was coded with a number ranging from 001 to 480. To maintain records for follow-up mailings and to assure respondents’ anonymity, each sample member’s corresponding code was added to the master list and included on his or her inventory. Once the individual returned the inventory, as indicated

by the code located on the survey itself and confirmed on the master list, that name was removed from the follow-up mailing list.

### Research Instrument

The Occupational Work Ethic Inventory (OWEI) was used as the research instrument for this study. The instrument was selected for its concise design, its simple and decisive language, ease of modification for various independent variables, ease of completion, and the limited amount of time required to complete the inventory. The OWEI is divided into three sections. The first section provides an introduction to inventory, the second section contains the inventory descriptors, and the last section collects the background and demographic information.

“Items for the instrument were selected from a list extracted from a review of literature regarding work attitudes, work values, and work habits” (Petty, 1995, Instrumentation section, ¶ 1). The three subscales of the OWEI include interpersonal skills, initiative, and being dependable. Preceding these 50 employability skills is the stem “at work I can describe myself as:” and is followed by a seven point Likert scale (Never = 1, Almost Never = 2, Seldom = 3, Sometimes = 4, Usually = 5, Almost Always = 6, and Always =7).

The OWEI was chosen because it addressed the specific research objectives was more user-friendly cost effective than other instruments. For example, the Employment Values Inventory (EVI) has 168 items and requires 30 - 40 minutes to complete (Allison, 1992). The EVI was deigned to measure 14 values and should be limited to informational and educational purposes. The time required to complete the EVI was not appropriate for this study.

McCarney's Work Adjustment Scale (WAS) requires only 12 –15 minutes to complete. However, it was too expensive for use with a large sample (Brown, 1991). The purpose of the WAS is to measure the student's preparedness for employment through a 54 item survey that focused on acceptable work behaviors. The WAS was developed specifically for high school students and, therefore, was not appropriate for this study.

Finally, Miles, Grumman and Maduschke's Working-Assessing Skills Habits and Style Instrument specifically addresses work habits and skills associated with work ethic and focused on job planning and career counseling (Camara, 1996). Designed for use with high school and college students, this survey was too time consuming, requiring 30-35 minutes to complete, and too expensive for use with a large sample.

The OWEI accomplished the purpose of this study, to establish the occupational work ethic of student workers, in a cost-effective and concise manner. A study conducted by Turner-Henry (1997) revealed that OWEI results were significant at the  $p < .05$  level. Turner-Henry determined that there were similar work ethics for Baby Boomers and Generation Xers as well as similarities based on gender.

The OWEI distributed by Hatcher (1995) was used to establish baseline data on the work ethic of apprentices and instructors in an industrial trade union. Hatcher's study focused on job titles and specialization, work experience, program progression, and the perceived work ethic differences between apprentices and their instructors. The *alpha* level was significant at .90. Hatcher concluded, "The success or failure of individuals and organization depends on employee's work ethics and attitudes toward work" (Implications for Educators and Researcher section, ¶ 1).



Another study, conducted by Petty (1995), compared the work ethic of private industry workers across the standard occupational classifications. The OWEI was significant at the .05 level. The study revealed that work ethic differed by occupations. Petty recommended that vocational-technical educators acknowledge the occupational differences and that they design programs to instill work ethic in students.

#### Independent Variables

Independent variables are generated from the second question: Are there demographic trends concerning work ethic within the Net Generation? The independent variables include age, gender, course load, class level, hours worked weekly, work experience, additional off-campus employment, financial responsibilities for school, their parent's education level and participation in the Federal Work Study Program. Because of the wide range of responses, and for ease of analysis once the data has been tabulated, the course load, hours worked weekly, work experience, and age would be fill-in-the-blank items. Fill-in-the-blank items avoid lumping responses together in pre-established groups and allow for more meaningful groups to be determined after the data has been collected. Participation in the Federal Work Study Program and additional off-campus employment each had multiple-choice options; (a) yes, and (b) no. Also multiple choice is gender with two options: (a) female and (b) male. The percentage of their educational costs the student is responsible for had five options; (a) none, (b) less than 20%, (c) 20% - 50%, (d) 51% - 80%, (e) more than 80%. Class level had five multiple-choice options; (a) freshman, (b) sophomore, (c) junior, (d) senior, and (e) graduate. The final item, the parent's education level had four options; (a) less than a Bachelor's degree, (b)

Bachelor's degree, (c) Master's degree, (d) more than a Master's degree (Ph.D., M.D., etc.).

It was expected that responses to the age and class level variables could closely correlate. However, both variables were necessary to learn more about the participants. It also was essential to determine whether or not the sample was representative of the known statistics of the population. The average course load is expected to fall between 12 to 15 credit hours, a part-time employee works 20 hours per work week. The relationship between these variables, and their relationship to the occupational work ethic subscales, would help identify the sample and population and would provide information regarding demographic trends within the Net Generation.

#### Dependent Variables

The dependent variables are limited to those included on the OWEI subscales and center on employability skills as identified by Hill and Petty (1995). The OWEI subscales are interpersonal skills, initiative, and being dependable. (Complete lists of subscale items are categorized in Appendix C).

#### Data Collection Procedures

The OWEI was distributed to the student workers selected and delivered to their on-campus job locations via campus mail. Once completed, respondents were instructed to return the completed inventories to their employers via campus mail. Return envelopes were enclosed in the packet. Dillman (1978) recommended distributing the survey through an initial mailing that included a cover letter designed to introduce the participant to the study and to motivate him or her to respond. A follow-up mailing was conducted two weeks after the initial mailing; it contained a revised cover letter.

### *Initial mailing.*

Each member of the sample had two manila envelopes. The first contained a letter of introduction to the research project, an individually coded Occupation Work Ethic Inventory, and an addressed return envelope. Attached to the OWEI was an introductory cover letter that would serve as an introduction to the research project and that included instructions for returning the completed inventory (Appendix E).

### *Follow-up mailing.*

The follow-up mailing was designed to solicit the return of additional completed instruments and was conducted two weeks after the first mailing. During preparation for the initial mailing, duplicate packets were prepared for the follow-up mailing. This second envelope contained a follow-up letter (Appendix F), an individually coded Occupational Work Ethic Inventory, and an addressed return envelope. As an individual returned his or her inventory, the corresponding follow-up envelope was removed from the second mailing box to ensure that those individuals who did complete and return their inventory did not receive additional packets. A stop date was established two weeks after the follow-up packets were mailed.

## Data Analysis

Means, standard deviations, correlations and frequency counts were the descriptive statistics methods used to determine and identify demographic trends within the sample. A multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to analyze the demographic information as determined by the independent variables and to compare generational differences in the occupational work ethic of student workers. The MANOVA was used, as opposed to simple correlations, because the MANOVA is a

parametric procedure that allowed the researcher to categorize the demographic comparisons into meaningful groups. Where the MANOVA was significant, an ANOVA test was used to identify the individual differences for each demographic item as they related to each subscale.

### Summary of Methodology

The subjects in this study were students who were enrolled in courses and employed part-time by The University of Tennessee during spring semester 2002. The Occupational Work Ethic Inventory (OWEI), designed by Petty, was used to determine the occupational work ethic of the subjects. The OWEI examines work ethic in three subscales: (a) interpersonal skills, (b) initiative, and (c) being dependable.

Means, standard deviations, correlations and frequency counts were the descriptive statistics methods used to analyze responses to the numeric research questions. A multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to analyze the continuous demographic information as determined by the independent variables. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to investigate the three subscale categories. Chapter Four explores the findings of the study.

## Chapter IV

### Findings

The purpose of this study was to compare generational differences in the occupational work ethic of student workers and to identify demographic trends within the sample. To collect the necessary data, the Occupational Work Ethic Inventory was distributed via campus mail to a sample of 480 student workers randomly selected from the total population of students employed by The University of Tennessee. The hypotheses focused on demographic variables and determining any differences between those variables and the occupational work ethic.

This chapter presents the results that were gathered from the returned surveys beginning with the rate of return, the reliability of the research instrument, the overall occupational work ethic of student workers, followed by demographic characteristics, and lastly this chapter explores the relationships between demographic variables and the occupational work ethic.

#### Return Rate

The population of student workers at The University of Tennessee is 1,920. According to Gay and Airasian (2000) a sample size of 320 is appropriate for a population with approximately 1,900 members. In an attempt to solicit the maximum number of responses, a sample of 480 was randomly selected. From this total, 182 surveys were completed and returned. The 38% return rate was sufficient to continue with the data analysis.

## Instrumentation

A reliability analysis revealed that The Occupational Work Ethic Inventory as a whole was a highly reliable instrument with Cronbach's Alpha of .8562. The Occupational Work Ethic Inventory had three subscales: (a) Interpersonal Skills, (b) Initiative, and (c) Being Dependable. Each subscale category was proven reliable with alpha scores of .8826, .8731 and .7173, respectively (Table 5). Although the Being Dependable subscale did not receive as high of an *alpha* level as the other subscale categories this could be a result of the category's having significantly fewer items than the other subscale categories. However, according to Nunnley and Bernstein (1994), an alpha level higher than .7 is considered reliable. Therefore it was concluded that The Occupational Work Ethic Inventory is a reliable research instrument.

### The Occupational Work Ethic of Student Workers

A reporting of the mean scores and standard deviations was used to report the descriptive statistics for the Occupational Work Ethic Inventory. On average, respondents had a 5.93 for Interpersonal Skills, with the lowest score a 4.13 and the highest a 7.00. The mean score for Initiative was 5.77, with the lowest score a 3.56 and the highest a 7.00. The mean score for Dependable was 6.10, with a range of 3.71 to 7.00. See Table 6.

### Demographic Variables

Demographic variables were examined to further identify and describe the sample. The demographic information collected included age, gender, class level, spring 2002 course load, participation in a Federal Work-Study Program, hours worked weekly, additional off-campus employment, the percentage of educational costs for which the

student was responsible, and their parent's education level. Frequencies and means were used to present this information.

The mean age of the respondents was 27.9 years old; the youngest was 20 years old, and the oldest was 51 years old (see Table 7). Eighty-two (45.1%) of the respondents were members of the Net Generation; 85 (46.7%) were members of Generation X, and 15 (8.0%) were members of the Baby Boom Generation. There were no members of the Veterans Generation Participated in the study.

Table 5.

*Cronbach's Alpha for Subscale Categories*

	Interpersonal Skills	Initiative	Being Dependable
Item Number	17, 22, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 37, 41, 42, 43, 46, 47, 48, 50	5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 14, 15, 18, 20, 27, 35, 36, 38, 40, 45, 49	1, 3, 4, 8, 12, 16, 23
Cronbach's Alpha	.8826	.8731	.7173

Table 6.

*Occupational Work Ethic of Student Workers*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Interpersonal Skills	4.13	7.00	5.9341	.59443
Initiative	3.56	7.00	5.7754	.58080
Dependable	3.71	7.00	6.1030	.57430

Table 7.

*Age Spread of Respondents*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Age	20	51	27.9

Table 8.

*Generation Groupings of Respondents*

Generation	Birth Years	Age 2002	Frequency	Percentage
Net Generation	1977 – 1997	5 – 25	82	45.1%
Generation X	1965 – 1976	26 – 37	85	46.7%
Baby Boomer	1946 – 1964	38 – 56	15	8.0%
Veteran	Before 1946	56 and older	0	0%

The second demographic variable, gender, is shown in Figure 2. The gender of the respondents revealed that 105 (57.7%) were female and 76 (41.8%) were male.

The next demographic variable was class level. One (.5%) of the respondents was a Freshman, 2 (1.1%) were Sophomores, 9 (4.9%) were Juniors, 16 (8.8%) were Seniors, and 153 (84.1%) were Graduate students. The results are shown in Figure 3.

The mean Spring 2002 course load was 9.60 hours. The minimum number of hours a respondent was registered for was 0, and the maximum was 21. The standard deviation was 4.312.



As Table 9 shows, the majority of the respondents did not participate in the Federal Work-Study Program. Out of the 182 respondents, only 6 (3.3%) participate in the program.

The mean number of hours worked weekly was 22.95. The minimum was 2 hours, and the maximum was 70 hours a week. The standard deviation was 11.788.

Each respondent had to be employed by The University of Tennessee (UTK) to be selected for this study. Thirty-five (19.2%) of the respondents, in addition to being employed by UTK, were also employed off-campus. The remainder of the sample (147 respondents, 80.8%) did not have additional employment off-campus. The results are shown in Table 9.

The mean number of years of work experience was 6.75. The minimum years of work experience was 0, and the maximum was 30. The standard deviation was 5.883.

The percentage of educational costs for which the student is responsible is depicted in Figure 6. Of all respondents, 24 (13.2%) were not responsible for paying any of their educational costs. There were 77 (42.3%) respondents who were responsible for paying less than 20% of the costs. In all, 23 (12.6%) of the respondents were responsible for paying 20% to 50% of their educational costs. In addition, 16 (8.8%) of the respondents were responsible for 51% to 80% of their educational costs, and 41 of the respondents were responsible for paying 80% or more of their educational costs.

The final variable, the highest level of education completed by the respondent's parent, is reported in Table 9. Of the 182 respondents, 58 (31.9%) reported their parent

Table 9.

*Demographic Information of Respondents*

Demographic Parameter	Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender of Respondents</b>		
Female	76	41.8%
Male	105	57.7%
<b>Class Level of Respondents</b>		
Freshman	1	.5%
Sophomore	2	1.1%
Junior	9	4.9%
Senior	16	8.8%
Graduate	153	84.1%
<b>Participation in the Federal Work Study Program</b>		
No	182	96.7%
Yes	6	3.3%
<b>Off-Campus Employment</b>		
No	147	80.8%
Yes	35	19.2%
<b>Percentage of educational costs for which the student is responsible</b>		
None	24	13.2%
Less the 20%	77	42.3%
20% - 50%	23	12.6%
51% - 80%	16	8.8%
More than 80%	41	23.1%
<b>Parent's Education Level</b>		
less than a Bachelor's Degree	58	31.9%
Bachelor's Degree	55	30.2%
Master's Degree	34	18.7%
More than a Master's Degree	34	18.7%

had less than a Bachelor's Degree, 55 (30.2%) reported that their parent had obtained a Bachelor's Degree, 34 (18.7%) reported that their parent had obtained a Master's Degree, and 34 (18.7%) reported that their parent had more than a Master's Degree.

*Demographic Variables and The Occupational Work Ethic*

The hypotheses for this study centered on the relationship between the occupational work ethic and various demographic variables. To determine if there was a relationship between the continuous measures and the occupational work ethic subscales correlations were used to analyze the information. To examine the categorical measures, MANOVAs were used. As displayed in Table 10, significant relationships could not be established between the demographic variables (work experience, Spring 2002 course load, hours worked weekly, age, educational costs for which the student is responsible, and their parent's education level) and the occupational work ethic subscales.

Table 10.

*Occupational Work Ethic and Demographic Variables*

	Interpersonal Skills	Initiative	Dependable
Work Experience	$r=.059$ $p=.431$	$r=.094$ $p=.0211$	$r=-.028$ $p=.708$
Spring 2002 Course Load	$r=-.106$ $p=.159$	$r=.012$ $p=.876$	$r=.001$ $p=.991$
Hours Worked Weekly	$r=-.027$ $p=.723$	$r=.002$ $p=.974$	$r=-.003$ $p=.971$
Age	$r=.065$ $p=.384$	$r=.113$ $p=.128$	$r=-.065$ $p=.386$

The researcher did not analyze the correlation between Spring 2002 class level and the occupational work ethic because of the high concentration of graduate level students. Data would not accurately reflect the correlation between class level and the occupational work ethic. Correlations between participation in the Federal Work-Study program and the occupational work ethic were also not calculated because of the limited number of respondents who did participate in the program. The data would not accurately reflect the correlation between participation in the Federal Work-Study Program and the occupational work ethic.

Table 11 shows the subscale means broken down by off-campus employment. A MANOVA was run to determine if the subscales differed by off campus employment. No significant differences were found. The MANOVA results were  $F(3, 178) = .902, p = .441$ .

Table 11.

*The OWEI Subscales and Off-Campus Employment*

Dependent Variable	Employed off-campus?	Mean	Standard Error
Interpersonal Skills	Yes	6.029	.100
	No	5.912	.049
Initiative	Yes	5.842	.098
	No	5.760	.048
Dependable	Yes	6.070	.097
	No	6.111	.047

Table 12 shows the subscale means broken down by the educational costs for which the student was responsible. A MANOVA was run to determine if the subscales differed by the percentage of educational costs for which the student was responsible. No significant differences were found. The MANOVA results were  $F(12, 460) = 1.512, p = .116$ .

Table 13 shows the subscale means broken down by the education level of each respondent. A MANOVA was run to determine if the subscales differed by the highest education level obtained by the respondent's parent. No significant differences were found. The MANOVA results were  $F(9, 426) = 1.143, p = .331$ .

This research focused on the assumed differences in work ethic dependent on the respondent's age, or the generation to which the respondent belonged. However, upon further analysis, the MANOVA revealed that there was no significant relationship between generation and the occupational work ethic subscales. The MANOVA results were  $F(6, 354) = 2.038, p = .060$ . The means tend to indicate a slight increase within each dependent variable and the corresponding generation (Table 14). The differences were marginal; scores for the Interpersonal Skills and Initiative decrease with younger respondents.

Table 15 shows the subscale means broken down by gender. The MANOVA found significant gender differences. The results of the MANOVA were  $F(3, 177) = 5.052, p = .002$ . To determine which of the subscales differed, individual ANOVAs were run for each subscale (Table 14). Both Interpersonal Skills and Dependable differed significantly. There were no significant differences with Initiative.

Table 12.

*The OWEI Subscales and the Educational Costs for which the Student is Responsible*

Dependent Variable	Percent of Educational Costs for which Student is Responsible	Mean	Standard Error
Interpersonal Skills	None	5.775	.120
	Less than 20%	6.061	.067
	20% - 50%	5.728	.122
	51% - 80%	5.992	.146
	More than 80%	5.863	.091
Initiative	None	5.691	.118
	Less than 20%	5.844	.066
	20% - 50%	5.538	.121
	51% - 80%	5.847	.145
	More than 80%	5.786	.090
Dependable	None	6.125	.117
	Less than 20%	6.178	.065
	20% - 50%	5.945	.120
	51% - 80%	5.911	.143
	More than 80%	6.122	.090

Table 13.

*The OWEI Subscales and the Education Level of the Respondent's Parents*

Dependent Variable	Parent's Education Level	Mean	Standard Error
Interpersonal Skills	Less than a Bachelor's Degree	5.959	.079
	Bachelor's Degree	5.907	.081
	Master's Degree	5.963	.103
	More than a Master's Degree	5.896	.103
Initiative	Less than a Bachelor's Degree	5.855	.076
	Bachelor's Degree	5.682	.079
	Master's Degree	5.800	.100
	More than a Master's Degree	5.755	.100
Dependable	Less than a Bachelor's Degree	6.101	.075
	Bachelor's Degree	5.980	.077
	Master's Degree	6.155	.098
	More than a Master's Degree	6.232	.098

Table 14.

*The OWEI Subscales by Generation*

Dependent Variable	Generation	Mean	Standard Error
Interpersonal Skills	Net	5.889	.066
	X	5.949	.065
	Baby Boom	6.098	.154
Initiative	Net	5.708	.064
	X	5.797	.063
	Baby Boom	6.021	.149
Dependable	Net	6.154	.064
	X	6.062	.062
	Baby Boom	6.059	.149



The means showed that females tend to have higher Interpersonal Skills and Dependable scores than the male respondents. Significant differences exist between the occupational work ethic subscales and gender. However, no significant relationships could be identified between the occupational work ethic subscales and generations. To further identify the occupational work ethic of student workers of different generations each generation is divided by gender. The generational divisions by gender are listed in Table 17.

Although gender differences existed among student workers as a whole, when divided into generations and gender, and compared to the occupational work ethic subscales the significant difference disappears. The interaction between generation and age was not significant. The statistical analysis of the differences concerning gender and the occupational work ethic subscales is weakened when the respondent's age is considered (see Table 18).

### Summary of Findings

Means, standard deviations, correlations and frequency counts were the descriptive statistics methods that were used to analyze responses to the numeric research questions. A MANOVA was used to analyze the continuous demographic information as determined by the independent variables. Cronbach's Alpha was performed to investigate the three subscale categories. The results indicated a significant relationship between the occupational work ethic subscales and gender. Females tended to have significantly higher score than males for two of the three subscales. No significant relationships were determined between the occupational work ethic and various demographic variables. Conclusions were discussed in Chapter V based on the findings.

Table 15.

*The OWEI Subscales and Gender*

Dependent Variable	Gender	Mean	Standard Error
Interpersonal Skills	Female	6.056	.056
	Male	5.756	.066
Initiative	Female	5.826	.056
	Male	5.692	.066
Dependable	Female	6.180	.056
	Male	5.996	.065

Table 16.

*An ANOVA of the OWEI Subscales and Gender*

Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Significance
Interpersonal Skills	3.961	3.961	11.925	.001*
Initiative	.796	.796	2.407	.123
Dependable	1.464	1.464	4.502	.035*

\* indicates Significant Difference;  $df = 1$ .

Table 17.

*Gender and Generation*

Gender	Generation			
	Net	X	Baby Boom	Veteran
Female	48	49	8	0
Male	34	36	6	0

Table 18.

*Gender, Age and the Occupational Work Ethic*

Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Interpersonal Skills	.654	.327	.980	.378
Initiative	.130	6.480E-02	.195	.823
Dependable	4.040E-02	2.020E-02	.061	.941

*df* = 2.

## Chapter V

### Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the research and examine the findings. The purpose of this study was to compare generational differences in the occupational work ethic of student workers and to identify demographic trends within the sample. This comprehensive understanding of the work ethic may lead to more effective student worker services, such as tailored training initiatives.

### Summary

As the Net Generation enters the workplace they will transform the demographic make-up of the workforce. Understanding the occupational work ethic of each generation may help ease generational differences within the workplace. This study focused on a comparison of generational differences in the occupational work ethic of student workers. Additionally, this study identified demographic characteristics within the sample that might interact with the occupational work ethic.

Participants for this study were student workers employed by The University of Tennessee. The sample size for this study was 480 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in Spring 2002 courses. Respondents were mailed an Occupational Work Ethic Inventory to their on-campus job location. The 50-item OWEI has three subscales: (a) interpersonal skills, (b) initiative, and (c) being dependable. Preceding these 50 employability skills is the stem "at work I can describe myself as:" and is followed by a seven point Likert-type scale. The first mailing included an introductory letter, an individually coded OWEI, and a return envelope. The second mailing was distributed two weeks after the initial mailing and included a letter requesting an immediate response, an

individually coded OWEI, and a return envelope. A total of 182 surveys were returned yielding a 38% response rate.

Findings were reported in Chapter IV. Means, standard deviations, correlations and frequency counts were the descriptive statistics methods that were used to analyze responses to the numeric research questions. A MANOVA was used to analyze the continuous demographic information as determined by the independent variables. Cronbach's Alpha was performed to investigate the three subscale categories.

Demographic variables were explored to help identify characteristics of the research sample and to further identify factors that may influence the occupational work ethic of student workers. This section summarizes the sample's demographic information.

1. The majority of the participants were members of Generation X (85, 46.7%). Eighty-two (46.7%) of the respondents were members of the Net Generation. The Baby Boom Generation had 15 (8%) of the respondents, and no respondents belonged to the Veterans Generation.
2. The majority of the respondents were females (105, 57.7%) The remaining 76 (41.8%) of the respondents were males.
3. The majority of the respondents were graduate level students (153, 84.1%). Sixteen (8.8%) of the respondents were Seniors. Nine (4.9%) of the respondents were Juniors. Two (1.1%) of the respondents were Sophomores, and only one Freshman (.5%) participated in the study.
4. The majority of the respondents (176, 96.7%) did not participate in the Federal Work Study Program. The remaining 3.3% (6) did participate in the program.
5. The mean number of hours worked weekly was 22.95. The minimum was 2 hours and the maximum was 70 hours a week.
6. Thirty-five (19.2%) of the respondents, in addition to being employed by The University of Tennessee, were also employed off-campus. The remainder of the sample, (147, 80.8%) did not have additional off-campus employment.

7. The mean number of years of work experience was 6.75. The minimum years of work experience was 0, and the maximum was 30.
8. Twenty-four (13.2%) of the respondents were not responsible for paying any of their educational costs. Seventy-seven (42.3%) of the respondents were responsible for paying less than 20% of the costs. Twenty-three (12.6%) of the respondents were responsible for paying 20% to 50% of their educational costs. Sixteen (8.8%) of the respondents were responsible for 51% to 80% of their educational costs and 41 of the respondents were responsible for paying 80% or more of their educational costs.
9. Of the 182 respondents, 58 (31.9%) reported their parent had less than a Bachelor's Degree, 55 (30.2%) reported that their parent had obtained a Bachelor's Degree, 34 (18.7%) reported that their parent had obtained a Master's Degree, and 34 (18.7%) reported that their parent had more than a Master's Degree.

#### Findings for the Hypotheses

Analysis of the data collected indicated there were no significant relationships between the occupational work ethic and the years of work experience, the student's course load, the number of hours worked weekly, the student's age, the student's participation in the work-study program, the student's class level, the student's parent's education level, additional off-campus employment, and the student's financial responsibility for school. However, significant differences existed between gender and the occupational work ethic. Females tend to have stronger scores for two of the three subscales.

#### Conclusions

Conclusions are based on the findings gathered from the data collected. As a result of this study, the following conclusions were reached:

1. Within this sample, gender is a determinant of the occupational work ethic.
2. Within this sample, the student's years of work experience, the student's course load, the number of hours worked weekly, the student's age, the

student's participation in the work-study program, the student's class level, the student's parent's education level, additional off-campus employment, and the student's financial responsibility for school does not have a significant effect on the occupational work ethic.

3. The findings from this study established a relationship between the occupational work ethic and gender within this sample, establishing baseline data for future research pertaining to gender and the occupational work ethic.

### Recommendations

Recommendations are based on the findings of the study and the conclusions drawn from the statistical analysis of the collected data. As a result of this study, the following recommendations were reached:

1. Generational stereotypes and varying approaches to work form a gap between members of different generations in the workplace. This research was unable to establish significant relationships between generation and the occupational work ethic. Specialized training that focuses on different approaches to work should be developed to help inform co-workers about differing approaches to work which could help ease inter-generational tensions.
2. Given that no significant relationships were identified between demographic variables and the occupational work ethic, further research is needed to determine if significant relationships can be identified between those variables and the occupational work ethic in other samples.
3. Given that no significant relationships were identified between demographic variables and the occupational work ethic, further research is needed to determine if significant relationships can be identified between other demographic variables and the occupational work ethic.
4. This research established baseline data in reference to each generation's scores concerning the occupational work ethic inventory subscales. While no significant relationships were established, the data does identify the strength and weakness of each generation.
5. As a result of the study, gender appears to be a determinant of an individual's occupational work ethic as identified through the three subscales. Further research and analysis is recommended to explore the relationship between the occupational work ethic and gender.

6. The lack of significant findings reveals that generations do not vary with regard to work ethic.
7. The findings indicate that those attending Graduate School are more alike than they are different.
8. Graduate students are not representative of their cohort.

### Implications

This study suggests that future research focus on why the work ethic of males and females differ in regard to two of the three subscales. The statistical analysis revealed a significant difference with females scoring higher on the interpersonal skills and dependability subscales. Future research should focus on gender differences as they relate to the occupational work ethic.

This research indicates that generational differences do not exist. Popular culture may focus on generational differences to explain tension in the workplace, however as indicated by the results of the OWEI, generation does not significantly relate to work ethic. Theories concerning generational differences and work ethic are not supported by the findings of this study.

Although members of older generations may perceive members of younger generations to have less work ethic, no significant relationship between age and the occupational work ethic were established. Literature and research focus on generational differences concerning the occupational work ethic to explain tension in the workplace (Hicks et al., 1999a; Wallace, 2001; Zemke et al., 2000). However, these perceived differences may be a result of varying approaches to work, which is influenced by an individual's childhood and parental influence. Future research focusing on differing



approaches to work and training initiatives in the workplace addressing the various needs of employee of different generation may help alleviate some workplace anxiety.

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**Appendices**





**Appendix A**

**The Occupational Work Ethic Inventory**

# OCCUPATIONAL WORK ETHIC INVENTORY

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*The purpose of this inventory is to obtain information about desirable characteristics of working individuals. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and your name is not required on this form. It is important for you to answer each item as truthfully as possible.*



DIRECTIONS:

For each work ethic descriptor listed below, CIRCLE THE NUMBER that most accurately describes your standards for that item. There are seven possible choices for each item:

Never    Almost Never    Seldom    Sometimes    Usually    Almost Always    Always  
 1            2            3            4            5            6            7

THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. There also is no time limit, but you should work as rapidly as possible. Please respond to every item on the list.

At work I can describe myself as:

Descriptors	Never			Always			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. dependable .....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. stubborn.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. following regulations .....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. following directions .....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. independent.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. ambitious.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. effective.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. reliable.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. tardy .....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. initiating.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. perceptive.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. honest.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. irresponsible.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. efficient .....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. adaptable .....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. careful .....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. appreciative .....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. accurate .....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. emotionally stable .....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. conscientious.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. depressed.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. patient.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. punctual.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. devious.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- 25. selfish .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 26. negligent.....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 27. persevering .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 28. likeable.....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 29. helpful .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 30. apathetic .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 31. pleasant .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 32. cooperative.....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 33. hard working .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 34. rude .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 35. orderly .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 36. enthusiastic.....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 37. cheerful .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 38. persistent .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 39. hostile.....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 40. dedicated .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 41. devoted.....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 42. courteous .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 43. considerate .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 44. careless.....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 45. productive .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 46. well groomed .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 47. friendly.....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 48. loyal.....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 49. resourceful.....1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 50. modest .....1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(OVER PLEASE)

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### DIRECTIONS:

Please check the appropriate response for each item. Completion of this inventory acknowledges your understanding that this data will be used for research purposes only and will be kept completely confidential.

### FILL IN THE BLANK

- (1) Years of work experience: \_\_\_\_\_
- (2) Spring 2002 course load: \_\_\_\_\_
- (3) Hours worked weekly: \_\_\_\_\_
- (4) Age: \_\_\_\_\_

### MULTIPLE CHOICE

- (5) Are you currently participating in the Federal Work-Study Program?
- Yes
- No
- (6) Spring 2002 class level
- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate
- (7) Gender
- Female
- Male
- (8) Are you also employed off-campus?
- Yes
- No
- (9) Approximately, what percentage of your educational costs do you pay?
- None
- Less than 20%
- 20% - 50%
- 51% - 80%
- More than 80%
- (10) Parent's education level
- Less than a Bachelor's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- More than a Master's Degree (Ph.D., M.D., etc)

**Appendix B**

**The Occupational Work Ethic Subscales Categorized**

### The Occupational Work Ethic Subscales

Interpersonal Skills	Initiative	Being Dependable
17. Apperceptive	5. Independent	1. Dependable
22. Patient	6. Ambitious	3. Following regulations
28. Likable	7. Effective	4. Following directions
29. Helpful	10. Initiating	8. Reliable
31. Pleasant	11. Perceptive	12. Honest
32. Cooperative	14. Efficient	16. Careful
33. Hard working	15. Adaptive	23. Punctual
37. Cheerful	18. Accurate	
41. Devoted	20. Conscientious	
42. Courteous	27. Persevering	
43. Considerate	35. Orderly	
46. Well groomed	36. Enthusiastic	
47. Friendly	38. Persistent	
48. Loyal	40. Dedicated	
50. Modest	45. Productive	
	50. Resourceful	

Adapted from Hill, R. B., & Petty, C. G. (1995). A new look at selected employability skills: A factor analysis of the occupational work ethic. *Journal of Vocational Education Research*, Retrieved from: <http://www.coe.uga.edu/~rhill/workethic.jverart.htm>

**Appendix C**  
**Introduction Letter**



# Memorandum

**Attention:** Student Worker

**Date:** January 7, 2002

**Subject:** Research Survey

**From:** Margaret Gribbin, Department of Human Resource Development  
Dr. Alan Chesney, Executive Director of Human Resources

In an effort to provide more effective services to student workers we need to know more about you. Therefore, we are conducting the attached survey. You have been randomly selected to participate in a research project out of a possible 1,920 student workers at the University of Tennessee. The research focuses on the work attitudes and behaviors of student workers, more specifically the occupational work ethic. The University has authorized the distribution of the attached survey, and we eagerly anticipate the prompt return of your completed survey.

We realize the beginning of the semester is hectic and we appreciate your anonymous participation in this study. The research results will be posted on the HR website and will be reported in numeric form only; individuals will not be identified.

**Appendix D**

**Follow-up Letter**

# Memorandum

**Attention:** Student Worker

**Date:** January 23, 2002

**Subject:** Research Survey

**From:** Margaret Gribbin, Human Resource Development Department  
Dr. Alan Chesney, Executive Director of Human Resources

Approximately two weeks ago you received a letter encouraging you to participate in a research study focusing on the work attitudes and behaviors of student workers. If you have completed and returned the survey, thank you for your participation and please disregard this packet. However, if you did not have an opportunity to complete and return the survey, or if you did not receive the first mailing, please take five minutes and complete the enclosed survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

This survey must be completed and returned by Friday, February 1, 2002, to be included in the research study. The research results will be posted on the HR website and will be reported in numeric form only; individuals will not be identified.

We realize the beginning of the semester is hectic and we greatly appreciate the prompt return of your survey.

## VITA

Margaret Anne Gribbin was the third of five children born to Patrick Hugh and Jane Elizabeth Gribbin. After receiving a Bachelor of Science Degree in Communication from The Florida State University in May 1999, she pursued a Master of Science Degree at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She graduated from The University of Tennessee in Spring 2003 with a concentration in Training and Development while being employed as a Human Resource Manager at a Leading Small Hotel of the World on the Chesapeake Bay.

