

# CULTURAL VALUES AND CAREER GOAL OF GEN-X AND GEN-Y EMPLOYEES: EVIDENCE FROM SELECTED MALAYSIAN COMPANIES

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**Abstract.** *This paper seeks to compare the influence of dimensions of cultural values of self-enhancement, self-transcendence, conservation, and openness to change on career goal among Gen-X and Gen-Y employees in selected Malaysian industrial companies. This study used the Social Cognitive Career Theory as its underlying theoretical framework. A total of 264 personnel from oil and gas, information, communication and technology (ICT), as well as banking and insurance companies participated in the study of whom 48 and 216 are Gen-X and Gen-Y employees, respectively. The multiple linear regression analysis found self-enhancement and conservation predicted significantly the career goal of Gen-X; while self-enhancement, self-transcendence, conservation predicted significantly the career goal of Gen-Y, with the explanatory power of the former (33%) being greater than the latter (28%). Recommendations for human resource management and future research are discussed.*

**Key words:** *cultural values, self-enhancement, self-transcendence, conservation, openness to change, career goal, Gen-X, Gen-Y*

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## 1. Introduction

The term “generation” refers to people born in the same general time span who share key historical, social life experiences, stages of development (Kupperschmidt, 2000;

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Smola & Sutton, 2002; Srinivasan, 2012), and were marked by similar cultural phenomena (Twenge et al., 2010). An intergenerational workforce refers to categorization of generations, which consists of Baby Boomers (born in 1940–1959), Gen-X (1960–1979) and Gen-Y (1980–2000). In any industrial region in the Southeast Asia including Malaysia, many companies have been in existence since the 90s and they are now mostly occupied by a sizeable number of younger employees of Gen-Y in addition to the existing Gen-X employees. This article specifically focuses on Gen-X and Gen-Y because these two generation cohorts make up the large majority of the intergenerational workforce in many organizations worldwide.

The organization of the paper is as follows: It starts with a discussion of the scenario of Gen-X and Gen-Y employees, and presentation of the research problem, followed by the conceptualization of cultural values and career goal and the overview of literature on the relationship between the two constructs. The theoretical framework, research procedures undertaken and results of the study are then discussed. The paper ends with a conclusion and recommendations.

### ***1.1 Scenario of Gen-X and Gen-Y Workforce: The Research Problem***

An interesting research gap in relation to the intergenerational workforce, i. e. the differences in terms of job outcomes among generations, specifically, Gen-X and Gen-Y employees, are still less explored (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007; Glass, 2007; Lyons & Kuron, 2014), one of which is about perception on how cultural values predict their career goal. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that work values are more influenced by generational experiences than by age and maturation (Smola & Sutton, 2002, p. 379). Wong et al. (2008) found that there are generational differences in personality and motivational drivers among the generations, however, these differences are not in relation to cultural values and career outcomes.

Zemke et al. (2000) and Gursoy et al. (2008) found in their studies several general differences between the two generation employees among which Gen-Y are comparatively more cooperative, they make better team players, and they are more optimistic about their future careers; they accept diversity in age, ethnicity, and gender because they want this world to be a better place for everyone to live. Gen-Y also tend to be more motivated by career progression and advancement than the other generation cohorts (Wong et al., 2008). Meanwhile, Gen-X tend to work smart and they prefer to balance their lives between work and family activities (work-life balance). Comparatively, Gen-X employees are more materialistic and skeptical as they worry more about the uncertain future (Angeline, 2011). However, “there is a growing realization that the gulf of misunderstanding and resentment between not-so-old (Gen-X) and younger employees (Gen-Y) in the workplace is growing and problematic” (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 1). It is worthwhile having diversity at workplace; however, certain cohort clashes need to be understood carefully (Glass, 2007), such as in terms of their perception to careers, specifically, how the dimensions of cultural values affect their career goal.

Career goals are related to the formation of a career identity based on self-perceived talents and aspiration (Ismail & Ramly, 2011; Ismail & Lu, 2014). Different generations in the workforce have their own perspectives about careers and may face challenges in the workplace such as how to deal with an opportunity for them to develop their professionalism harmoniously. Leaders can do more to increase productivity, morale and employee retention by understanding each Gen-X and Gen-Y employees and by giving them what they need to thrive in terms of careers (Zemke et al., 2000). This study further responds to calls by Westerman and Yamamura (2007), Glass (2007) and Twenge (2010) for more investigations on generational differences, one of which is how differences in cultural values affect career behaviors such as career goal. This study focuses only on two groups of Gen-X and Gen-Y employees as they comprise most in the Malaysian industrial workforce.

The advantage of focusing on work values in contrast to personality traits is that they represent more proximal predictors of career intent. Longitudinal research has also demonstrated that young people's cultural values and the perceived importance of various job characteristics help shape their career choices including career goal (Johnson & Mortimer, 2011). The majority of past research in Malaysia was primarily concentrated on comparing the cultural values and behavior of inter-ethnicities in the workplace (Thien et al., 2014; Ting & Ying, 2013). In addition, Teng and Tay (2012) found that socio-historical events influenced the lives of the Malaysian research subjects, in which Gen-X listed the internet, social networking, the New Economic Policy, and September 11 tragedy, while Gen-Y listed the internet and social networking as among the events that influenced their worldviews. Despite the fact that culture is singled out as uniquely important to career research (Thomas & Inkson, 2007), no study so far has looked into the relationship between cultural values and career goal among generation cohorts, specifically, of Malaysian employees of Gen-X and Gen-Y.

The PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Malaysia stated that the younger generation of Millennials (or Gen-Y) took up some 40-50% of the workforce in 2014. The generation forms 25% of the workforce in the US and accounts for over half of the population in India, and by 2020, Millennials will form 50% of the global workforce. Thus, this study focuses on Gen-X and Gen-Y as they make up about 90% of the Malaysian workforce in the industrial sectors (Lowyat.net, 2013). The older generation of Baby Boomers was not considered as the subject in this research because of their dwindling number following retirement.

In the context of this study, it is interesting that Malaysia, with a population of 31.7 million in 2016, which is expected to rise to 32.6 million by 2020 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016), has undergone tremendous developments at the turn of the century. An investigation on cultural values and their influence on career goal is vital, particularly in seeing the dynamism of an aspect of careers in the context of Gen-X and Gen-Y workforce against the backdrop of intensive development towards achieving a developed status nation by 2020. The differences of Gen X-and Gen-Y employees have potential to cause a serious conflict within the workplace if the differences such as

in relation to their cultural values and career goals are ignored (Karp & Sirias, 2001). This paper, therefore, aims to examine the influence of four dimensions of cultural values of self-enhancement, self-transcendence, conservation, and openness to change (Schwartz, 2012) on the career goal of Gen-X and Gen-Y employees in selected industrial companies in Malaysia.

Hence, this study aims to fill this knowledge gap and is guided by the following research questions: What is the level of cultural values and career goal, according to the generational cohorts of Gen-X and Gen-Y? Are there significant differences in cultural values and career goal among the Gen-X and Gen-Y employees? What is the relationship between cultural values and the career goal of the generational cohorts? Which cultural value predicts most the career goal of each of the generational cohorts? The findings of this study would contribute insights to theory and practice in human resource management in two ways: First, this study would contribute to literature on cultural values and their influence on the career goal of Gen-X and Gen-Y workforce in an emerging Asian economy, Malaysia. Second, organizations can use such information on personal cultural values to design management intervention and build work environment to meet the expectations of the respective generation cohorts in relation to cultural values and the influence on career goal.

### 1.2 Conceptualizing Cultural Values

Culture is a combination of values, beliefs and norms, and it is shared among the individuals in their daily lives (Rasool et al., 2012). Cultural values act as one of the guiding principles of a person's life, which may then affect any behavioural outcome (Schwartz,

2012). The Schwartz Theory of Basic Values (2012) defines 10 life values by their underlying motivation. The theory is based on three assumptions: i) individuals differ in importance to place on values; ii) values are bases for judging appropriate behavior; and iii) values provide a sense of future goals individuals would like to achieve.

This study adopts Schwartz's conceptualization of cultural values (2012, p. 8) in which these cultural values are organized around a circumflex structure made up of two axes (Figure 1). Each of these axes has two opposite poles: self-enhancement, which is the opposite of self-transcendence; and



FIGURE 1: Schwartz's core dimensions and specific cultural values

Source: Schwartz (2012, p. 9)

conservation, which is the opposite of openness to change. Self-enhancement includes values related to power and achievement; self-transcendence encompasses values related to benevolence and universalism; conservation is made up of values relating to tradition, conformity, and security; and openness to change comprises values related to self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism.

The model posits that individuals who emphasize self-enhancement values want to be successful and powerful. They aim to control people and resources, are ambitious, and wish to gain general praises for their successes. They are expected to generate and/or support a culture that encourages themselves to work hard, set high goals for themselves and for the organization; and build as well as accept a hierarchical structure that imposes roles and obligations (Sagiv et al., 2005, p. 184). Self-transcendence values, in contrast, encourage tolerance, cooperation, mutual support and concern for the surrounding community. Openness to change values emphasize autonomy of thought and action (self-direction), novelty and excitement (stimulation) and they tend to seek autonomy in their work (Sagiv et al., 2007). They more readily adopt new technologies and express greater willingness to accept voluntary organizational change. Individuals with conservation values put their priority to respect and acceptance of the customs and ideas (tradition), restraints of action and impulses that could disrupt social norms (conformity), and also emphasize societal and personal security (Schwartz et al., 2012). Work values are the underlying preferences and beliefs that should be satisfied in people's career choices and career goal (White, 2005). A recent study by Hirschi and Fischer (2013) used Schwartz's values to investigate the effects of work values on entrepreneurial intentions.

This study did not use Hofstede's (1980) dimension of cultural values as many critics claim it is being over-researched, too condensed to capture culture and has some validity and reliability limitations (Spector et al., 2001). Schwartz's (2012) set of cultural values was developed with systematic sampling, measurement and analysis techniques; and its normative data were collected in the late 1980s and early 1990s and had been validated across cultures (Schwartz et al., 2001; Schwartz, 2005).

### ***1.3 Career Goal Defined***

Career goal can be defined as a target towards which an individual's effort is directed within a specified profession (Colakoglu & Caligiuri, 2012, p.264). Career goal reflects the strength of an individual's intention and desire to achieve and therefore formulate effort towards achieving it sooner or later. Career aspiration is similar to career goal in the sense that both constructs provide an important drive for future actions in careers (Rojewski, 2005).

This study operationalizes career goal based on career orientations conceptualized by Mayrhofer et al., (2005), namely company world, free-floating professionalism, self-employment, and chronic flexibility. Theoretically this is based on Bourdieu's (1987) conceptualization, which takes a career field and habitus perspective of careers. These

four types of career orientation are derived from the theorization of career field, which are governed through the interplay between two dimensions of coupling and configuration between actors (Mayrhofer et al., 2004; 2000, p.5). The coupling dimension refers to closeness of relationship and the degree of mutual influence between the main actors and the other actors in the field. Tight coupling means the actors are closely intertwined in the actions. While loose coupling is a type of relationship where the decisions of one actor have very little consequences for the decisions of the other. The configuration dimension relates to changes in the nature of relationship between the main and other relevant actors in the field. A stable configuration means that neither the social environment nor the tasks of the main actor change rapidly and frequently. Conversely, an unstable configuration means that there is a frequent change in the configuration of actors and work-related tasks. The matrix of these two dimension results in the four types of career goals as indicated above.

Career field is a social field, it reflects a patterned set of practices, which suggests a competent action as well as a ground in which actors, endowed with a certain field-relevant capital, try to advance their position. Career fields have a dynamic quality. This reflects the focal relationship between work and time.

Career habitus is a habitus which “fits” to a particular career field. The idea of progression and a desire for growth is central in career habitus. This dynamic quality may take different forms depending on the field’s rules such as climbing the hierarchical ladder, increasing level of expertise (Mayrhofer et al., 2004, p. 6). In addition, career habitus is an ensemble of perception, thinking, feeling, and acting that come before all the expressive, verbal, and practical manifestations and utterances of an individual. Habitus and field are linked in a circular relationship. Involvement in a field shapes the habitus which, in turn, shapes the actions that reproduce the field (May, 2004, p. 874). Even though career habitus is specifically not considered in this study, the application of career fields would inevitably relate to the notion that career is about the psychological dimensions that one engages in before all the expressive and practical actions of an individual’s career.

This operationalization of career goal is further supported by Coetzee and Schreuder (2009) who state that career orientations (career fields and habitus) are closely related to the notion of career goal as career orientations activate and guide one’s intention and commitment towards achieving his/her future careers. Specifically, company world is the career field of organizational careers within companies. Therefore, this type of career field relates to the notion that people strive for a position of job responsibility within one organization and is generally linked to seniority in the hierarchical level (Hanappi, 2011).

Free-floating professionalism, self-employment, and chronic flexibility are essentially relevant to the notion of borderless and protean careers (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Baruch, 2004; Ismail, 2016), which emphasizes the fact that careers know no border and individuals manage their own careers. Free-floating professionalism refers to the



field where individuals such as specialists want to be under the contract of one or a few organizations for special and challenging tasks. Individuals have a close relationship with one customer at a time but the relationship is of limited duration and customers are changing fast. A dentist who works in a private clinic is an example of a chosen career field (Kanter, 1989).

Self-employment is a field of career in which individuals work outside organizations as either self-employed professionals or entrepreneurs (Mayrhofer et al., 2005, p. 41). Individuals in this field of career usually have several or many customers at a time, although these customers do not change rapidly. Child care workers are examples of self-employed workers.

The last career goal refers to the chronic flexibility, characterized by frequent job changes, partly similar to free-floating professionalism. However, individuals in this type of career destination aspire to take on a 'freelance' career with different projects for various clients and ever-changing work contents (Mayrhofer et al., 2005), such as from one industry to another. An example is an interior decorator or IT consultant on a freelance basis. It is, however, noted that the four dimensions of career goal are treated as a single dependent variable in this study because it is not the aim of the study to differentiate them, it focuses more on how each cultural value influences the magnitude of career goal in a composite form of the Gen-X and Gen-Y employees, respectively.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

This study adopts the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 2000) as its underlying theoretical framework. The theory postulates that career development is influenced by objective factors such as the educational experiences and their perceived environmental factors. The SCCT further emphasizes the related construct of outcome expectations, the beliefs about the consequences of performing particular courses of action, together with self-efficacy beliefs and cultural values, the major factors that affect career goals (Sheu et al., 2010).

Based on the SCCT, cultural values are parts of constructs that consist of contextual factors and are dependent on person inputs such as generational cohorts. The theory describes that cultural values and person input will influence choice behavior, one of which is career goal. The theory further posits that social interest of an individual is likely to pursue a social-type career, which then leads to any relevant actions such as aspiring to be self-employed, to work for a position of responsibility, to be under contract to one or few organizations for special and challenging tasks. In addition, the perception of beneficial environmental factors (e.g., being highly aspiring and having self-direction) is predicted to help the process of translating one's interests into goal and later into actions. Based on this theory, Hirschi and Fischer (2013) conclude that work values represent a motivational foundation that should be an important factor in understanding why some people have the inclination toward achieving a certain type and

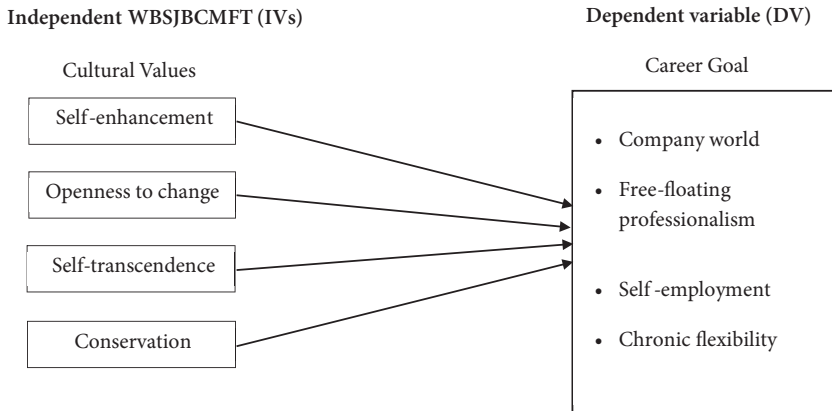


FIGURE 2: Research framework showing cultural values and career goal

level of career goal. Hence, the conceptual framework of this study (Figure 2) shows self-enhancement, self-transcendence, conservation, and openness to change as the independent variables, and career goal as the dependent variable.

Saba (2013) revealed that younger workers tend to show higher expectations regarding career advancement, employability, and work-family balance than workers from the older generations including Gen-X. Similarly, Terjesen et al. (2007) found that Gen-Y are more interested in employers who can provide effective career management and allow diversity in the daily work. These characteristics of Gen-Y are due to them being in the career exploration stage, which is the beginning of the career stage. The older generations generally appear to be slightly more satisfied with their jobs than the younger generations (Ng & Feldman, 2009). As Gen-Y have been found to have high expectations and desire for change and variety in careers (Lyons et al., 2012), it is probable they would have high determination when deciding their career goals.

Self-enhancement which encompasses achievement and power values is particularly relevant to objective career success (Frieze et al., 2006). Further, several studies have shown that ambitious people tend to be more successful in their careers in terms of salary, job position, and occupational prestige (Judge et al., 2012), and graduates who found it important to advance in their careers were more likely to attain an elevated hierarchical status in their early and mid-careers (Spurk & Abele, 2011). Granrose (2007) stated that employees who valued achievement showed positive contribution to career goals. Employees from Gen-Y also known as netizens used networking (self-transcendence) as a career strategy to achieve their career goal.

Fatoki (2014) investigated the personal values of university students (Gen-Y or younger) in South Africa using the Schwartz Portrait Value Questionnaire. The results indicated that achievement is the most significant value (self-enhancement), followed by self-direction (openness to change), security (conservatism), benevolence and universalism (self-transcendence). Inglehart (1997) added that the Gen-Y will give greater



priority to hedonism, stimulation, self-direction (openness to change), and universalism values (self-transcendence), but less priority to security, tradition, and conformity values (conservatism). Meanwhile, in early adulthood, their primary concern focuses on the world of work and family, thus the needs for achievement are great, both on the job and initiation of a family. Challenges faced by young adults encourage the pursuit of stimulation values and achievement.

We then expect that Gen-Y place higher confidence and achievement to self-enhancement value in comparison with Gen X in deciding their career direction. We therefore hypothesized:

H1: Self-enhancement significantly influences career goal of Gen-X and Gen-Y (H1a), the magnitude of Gen-X being smaller than that of Gen-Y (H1b).

Lyons et al. (2007) used the Schwartz Values Survey (Schwartz, 1992) in their study to assess differences in values between generations and found significant differences in values, among which Gen-X scored higher on openness to change than Gen-Y. Cennamo and Gardner (2008) found that younger generations placed more importance on status than the older group, moreover, the former valued freedom-related items more than the latter. The authors suggested that these findings may actually be due to the career stage of the older group including Gen-X, as they no longer felt the need to earn status. However, Broadbridge et al. (2007) noted that young employees in the UK are ready to sacrifice their work-life balance (which is related to hedonism values/openness to change) in the short term, or even to relocate their job, in order to find a satisfying career. But the study did not make comparison with the older employees. Even though the evidence shows that openness to change influences career goal, it is not clear which generation felt the impact more. We therefore hypothesized:

H2: Openness to change significantly influences career goal of Gen-X and Gen-Y, however, with no significant difference in magnitude between the two generation cohorts.

Individuals who hold self-transcendence as the most important life priority are likely to regard the values of universalism and benevolence as very important. Hence, they would be motivated by altruistic work motivators such as having a job that helps society fulfill their career goal. Gen-X give great importance to spending time with their family and maintaining a work-life balance (Hachtmann, 2008). A balance between work and family life takes precedence over corporate goals (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Similarly, Gen-Y, who are known to be IT-savvy, seek to enjoy work and believe that equal opportunity, tolerance and having social relationships are very important values (Broadbridge et al., 2007), which then will affect their career behaviors. The evidence shows self-transcendence equally influences career goal of both Gen-X and Gen-Y. We then hypothesized:

H3: Self-transcendence significantly influences career goal of Gen-X and Gen-Y, however, with no significant difference in magnitude between the two generation cohorts.

Lim (2012) found that conservation was the most important life priority to Gen-Y in the United Arab Emirates. They were more motivated by extrinsic (such as income, promotion, opportunities, and status) than intrinsic rewards. Since Gen-X experienced the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, they have developed low trust and are quite skeptical on their organization and have very low tolerance for bureaucracy and organizational regulations, especially regarding procedures that will obligate their performance in careers (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007). Gen-Y employees on the other hand will perform more effectively if they are provided with a nurturing, dynamic, and challenging workplace that includes open work spaces, state-of-the-art technology, and flexibility (Ferri-Reed, 2010). Gen-Y may be in favour of the structure and company goal, but they may also want to pick and choose the types of tasks and how those tasks are completed; otherwise this may create conflict within the company (Hershatter et al., 2010). Meanwhile, Inglehart (1997) demonstrated that older persons (Gen-X) in much of the world give higher priority to materialist (emphasize economy and physical security) versus post-materialist (emphasize self-expression and quality of life) values than younger people. Ismail and Abdul Rahim (2016) found that tradition makes the strongest contribution to career goals, followed by achievement among the industrial Malaysian employees of whom the majority (78%) is from the Gen-Y. However, in the middle adulthood (primarily the Gen-X), though in different context, employees were found to invest in established family, work, and social relations, with emphasis more on security, conformity, and tradition (conservation values) (Inglehart, 1997). We therefore hypothesized:

H4: Conservation significantly influences career goal of Gen-X and Gen-Y (H4a), with the magnitude of Gen-X larger than that of Gen-Y (H1b).

### 3. Method

The two generation cohorts in this study comprise representatives from three major industries in Malaysia, namely oil and gas, ICT, and banking and insurance, as these industries are among the major contributors to Malaysia's economy. The study sample was selected randomly from three companies each representing the above-mentioned industries. The sample size was determined using G-power approach. For the effect size .15, power .95, and number of predictors 4, G-power suggested having a minimum sample size of 129 for one industry. As this study involved three industries, the expected sample was to be 387. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed through drop-and-collect and emailed techniques, and 266 questionnaires were returned by the respondents of Gen-X and Gen-Y within a month. Thus, the overall response rate was 66.5%.

Our survey instrument was adapted from Schwartz's Value Survey (SVS) (Schwartz, 1994) for questions on cultural values. Respondents were asked to respond to the appropriate answers they thought were important using a 5-point Likert scale (1=not important to 5=very important). Self-enhancement consists of 11 items. An example of

the item from each dimension of self-enhancement that describes oneself is “Ambitious and hard-working” (achievement) and “Control over others or dominance” (power). Self-transcendence consists of 18 items. Examples are “Equality (equal opportunity for all)” and “A spiritual life (emphasis on spiritual not material matters)”. Conservation consists of 16 items. Examples are “It is important to me to maintain traditional values or beliefs” and “Obeying all the laws is important to me”. Openness to change consists of 12 items. Examples are “Having a good time is important to me” and “Having freedom of action and thought is crucial to me”.

Career goal was measured using Vienna Career Panel Project (ViCaPP) (Mayrhofer et al., 2005). Career goal section consists of 60 questions on job potential and perspectives using a 5-point Likert scale (1=very undesirable to 5=very desirable) for respondents to respond. Examples of the question are “To attain a highly influential position in an organization”, and “To deal frequently with different tasks and business clients”. The data were then analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Gen-Y consists of respondents under the age of 35 (81.8%), while the age of Gen-X respondents ranges between 36 and 50 (18.2%) (Table 1). Gen-Y exceeded Gen-X and being close to the ratio of 4:1 reflects the current scenario of the two generation cohort employees in some industrial organization in Malaysia even though as a whole the ratio between the two is almost 1:1 ([//www.google.com/search?q=malaysian+workforce](http://www.google.com/search?q=malaysian+workforce)).

TABLE 1. Demographic profiles of respondents (n=264)

Profile	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
<b>Age (years)</b>		
20-25	92	34.8
26-30	74	28.0
31-35	50	18.9
36-40	26	9.8
41-45	16	6.0
46-50	8	3.0
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	109	41.3
Female	155	58.7
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	157	59.5
Married	106	40.2
Divorced	1	0.4
<b>Level of Education</b>		
PMR/SPM	18	6.8
HSC/Matriculation/A Level	5	1.9
Diploma	39	14.8
Bachelor's degree	184	69.7
Master's degree	18	6.8

This is supported by the survey conducted by PwC (2014), which estimated that Gen-Y will further increase to about 75% of the global workforce by the year 2025. A total of 155 (58.7%) respondents were female and 59.5% single; 69.7% had a Bachelor degree, followed by Diploma (14.8%), and equal numbers (6.8%) of the respondents had a Master's degree and lower secondary school certificate or Malaysian School Certificate qualification.

A total of 31.8% respondents were with monthly income above RM5001, 37.5% worked in human resources and administrative functions, while 18.2% in engineering and technology/science-related functions such as geoscience, and 16.7% were in the ICT-based occupational groups such as software developer and system analyst. With regard to job positions, 67.0% were executive, 13.3% manager and 12.1% sale agent (Table 2).

TABLE 2. Occupational profiles of the respondents (n=264)

Profile	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
<b>Salary</b>		
Less than RM2000	32	12.1
RM2001-RM3000	64	24.2
RM3001-RM4000	58	22.0
RM4001-RM5000	26	9.8
Above RM5001	84	31.8
<b>Occupational Profiles</b>		
HR & Admin.	99	37.5
ICT-based	44	16.7
Insurance & Banking	73	27.7
Engineer & Tech./Science Related	48	18.2
<b>Job Position</b>		
Manager	35	13.3
Executive	177	67.0
Agent	32	12.1
Supervisor	2	0.8
Trainee & Support Staff	18	6.8

Female employees that exceed male employees in this sample could be explained by the fact that the respondents were chosen from the urban areas of Klang Valley in Malaysia and they were from the division of human resources, where women dominated the posts. This evidence was supported by Brandl et al. (2008) and Reichel et al. (2010), where they found that in numerous industrialized countries, women represented the majority of HR personnel. The majority of respondents had high educational level, which shows that the three types of companies in the country tend to recruit highly educated young female employees.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 Level of Cultural Values and Career Goals

Table 3 shows that all four factors of cultural values were perceived high by both generational cohorts. Specifically, self-transcendence which includes values related to universalism and benevolence showed the highest in both Gen-X ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ) and Gen Y ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 0.48$ ). Next is openness to change which encompasses values of self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism ( $M = 4.03$ ,  $SD = 0.45$  for Gen X and  $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 0.45$  for Gen Y). Similarly, the four dimensions of career goals were perceived high by both generation cohorts (Table 4).

### 4.2 Difference on Cultural Values and Career Goals of Gen-X and Gen-Y

The independent sample t-test for cultural values and career goals for two generational cohorts shows that there are significant differences in career goal and on openness to change between Gen-X and Gen-Y. The career goal for Gen-Y ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ) was higher than that for Gen X ( $M = 3.74$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ). This difference is supported by Saba (2013) and (Lyons et al., 2012). Similarly, openness to change in Gen-Y ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 0.45$ ) was higher than that in Gen-X ( $M = 4.03$ ,  $SD = 0.45$ ) (Table 5).

TABLE 3. Level of cultural values of Gen-Y and Gen-X

Cultural Values	Level	Gen Y (n=216)	Gen X (n=48)
		f	f
Self-enhancement	Low (1-2.33)	0	0
	Moderate (2.34-3.67)	24	9
	High (3.68-5.0)	192	39
		Mean = 4.16 SD = 0.43	Mean = 4.05 SD = 0.42
Openness to change	Low (1-2.33)	0	0
	Moderate (2.34-3.67)	29	12
	High (3.68-5.0)	187	36
		Mean = 4.21 SD = 0.45	Mean = 4.03 SD = 0.45
Self-transcendence	Low (1-2.33)	0	0
	Moderate (2.34-3.67)	22	4
	High (3.68-5.0)	194	44
		Mean = 4.29 SD = 0.48	Mean = 4.30 SD = 0.44
Conservation	Low (1-2.33)	0	0
	Moderate (2.34-3.67)	43	8
	High (3.68-5.0)	173	40
		Mean = 4.05 SD = 0.48	Mean = 4.07 SD = 0.50

TABLE 4. Level of career goals of Gen-Y and Gen-X

Career Goals	Level	Gen Y (n=216)	Gen X (n=48)
		Freq.	Freq.
Company World	Low (1-2.33)	0	0
	Moderate (2.34-3.67)	62	19
	High (3.68-5.0)	154	29
		Mean = 3.96 SD = 0.52	Mean = 3.87 SD = 0.58
Free-Floating Professional	Low (1-2.33)	0	0
	Moderate (2.34-3.67)	70	26
	High (3.68-5.0)	146	22
		Mean = 3.95 SD = 0.53	Mean = 3.74 SD = 0.56
Self-Employment	Low (1-2.33)	1	0
	Moderate (2.34-3.67)	72	20
	High (3.68-5.0)	143	28
		Mean = 3.89 SD = 0.60	Mean = 3.70 SD = 0.56
Chronic Flexibility	Low (1-2.33)	0	0
	Moderate (2.34-3.67)	72	23
	High (3.68-5.0)	144	25
		Mean = 3.90 SD = 0.54	Mean = 3.65 SD = 0.54
Overall	Low (1-2.33)	0	0
	Moderate (2.34-3.67)	67	22
	High (3.68-5.0)	149 Mean = 3.93 SD = 0.50	26 Mean = 3.74 SD = 0.51

TABLE 5. Difference in the means of variables of Gen-Y and Gen-X

Variables	Respondents	n	M	SD	t	Sig.
Career Goal	Gen-Y	216	3.93	0.50	2.30	.02
	Gen-X	48	3.74	0.51		
Self-enhancement	Gen-Y	216	4.16	0.43	1.66	.10
	Gen-X	48	4.05	0.42		
Openness to change	Gen-Y	216	4.21	0.45	2.44	.02
	Gen-X	48	4.03	0.45		
Self-transcendence	Gen-Y	216	4.29	0.48	-0.17	.86
	Gen-X	48	4.30	0.44		
Conservation	Gen-Y	216	4.05	0.48	-0.15	.88
	Gen-X	48	4.07	0.50		



### 4.3 Correlation and Influence of Cultural Values on the Career Goal of Gen-X and Gen-Y

The correlation results in Table 6 show that in Gen-X, self-enhancement and career goal was found to be highly related ( $r = .51, p = .0001$ ), followed by conservation ( $.44, p = .0001$ ), openness to change ( $r = .42, p = .0001$ ) and self-transcendence ( $r = .27, p = .0001$ ). By contrast, in Gen-Y a positive correlation was found to exist between conservation and career goal ( $r = .48, p = .0001$ ), followed by correlation between self-transcendence and career goal ( $r = .44, p = .0001$ ), self-enhancement ( $r = .39, p = .0001$ ) and openness to change ( $r = .37, p = .0001$ ) and career goal. This suggests that career goal tends to increase when the level of self-enhancement, conservation, openness to change, and self-transcendence increase in both Gen-X and Gen-Y.

TABLE 6. Correlation matrix of variables for Gen-Y and Gen-X

	Variables	Gen-Y (n = 216)				Gen-X (n = 48)			
		Y	X <sub>1</sub>	X <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>3</sub>	Y	X <sub>1</sub>	X <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>3</sub>
Y	Career Goal								
X <sub>1</sub>	Self-enhancement	.39**				.51**			
X <sub>2</sub>	Openness to change	.37**	.47**			.42*	.32*		
X <sub>3</sub>	Self-transcendence	.44**	.35**	.62**		.27*	.23	.57**	
X <sub>4</sub>	Conservation	.48**	.38**	.50**	.67**	.44**	.36*	.41*	.65**

Notes: \*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (one-tailed); \*\*correlation is significant at the .01 level (one-tailed).

Results of multiple regression analysis (Table 7) show that self-enhancement (beta = .34), and conservation (beta = .33) were found to be the significant predictors of career goal of Gen-X; and three variables of conservation (beta = .27), self-enhancement (beta = .21), and self-transcendence (beta = .17) are significant predictors of career goal of Gen-Y. The adjusted  $R^2$  is at .33; hence, these cultural values explain 33% of the variance in the career goal of Gen-X respondents. Likewise in Gen-Y the adjusted  $R^2$  is at .28, which implies the three variables explain 28% of the variance in the career goal of Gen-Y employees.

Conservation which consists of perceived tradition, conformity, and security values had the largest predicting coefficient (.27) in Gen-Y; while self-enhancement which comprises power and achievement had the largest explanatory power (.34) in Gen-X. This shows the career goal of both generation employees is significantly affected by different cultural values. These results were reasonable for a model with four predictors of 264 respondents. The summary of hypotheses in relation to the regression results

**TABLE 7. Regression analysis of career goal for Gen-Y and Gen-X**

	Gen-Y			Gen-X		
	Standardized coefficient			Standardized coefficient		
	beta	P	R <sup>2</sup> (Adj. R <sup>2</sup> )	beta	P	R <sup>2</sup> (Adj. R <sup>2</sup> )
(Constant)						
Self enhancement (X <sub>1</sub> )	.21	.02		.34	.01	
Openness to change (X <sub>2</sub> )	.02	.77		.28	.07	
Self-transcendence (X <sub>3</sub> )	.17	.05		-.19	.29	
Conservation (X <sub>4</sub> )	.27	.00		.33	.05	
			.30 (.28)			.38 (.33)

Notes: For Gen Y: R = .55, R<sup>2</sup> = .30, Adj. R<sup>2</sup> = .28, F = 22.33, p = .0001

For Gen X: R = .62, R<sup>2</sup> = .38, Adj. R<sup>2</sup> = .33, F = 6.69, p = .0001

is presented in Table 8. The table shows that H1a is supported, while H1b is not supported; H2 is not supported; H3 is partially supported implying significance only in Gen-Y; and H4a and H4b are fully supported.

**TABLE 8. Summary of hypothesis and decision**

Hypothesis		Decision
H1	Self-enhancement significantly influences career goal of Gen-X and Gen-Y (H1a), with the magnitude of Gen-X is smaller than that of Gen-Y (H1b).	H1a is fully supported. H1b is not supported.
H2	Openness to change significantly influences career goal of Gen-X and Gen-Y, however with no significant difference in magnitude between the two generation cohorts.	H2 not supported.
H3	Self-transcendence significantly influences career goal of Gen-X and Gen-Y, however with no significant difference in magnitude between the two generation cohorts.	H3 is partially supported. (only significant for Gen-Y)
H4	Conservation significantly influences career goal of Gen-X and Gen-Y (H4a), with the magnitude of Gen-X is larger than that of Gen-Y (H1b).	H4a is fully supported. H4b is fully supported.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

It is concluded that all four dimensions of cultural values and the career goal for both groups of workforce indicated high level. Similarly, there are significant relationships between individual cultural values and career goal of the employees and this is supported by the study of Kaygin and Gulluce (2013). However, descriptively only openness to change (self-direction and stimulation values) and career goal were found to have significant difference among the two employee cohorts with the respective means

higher for Gen-Y than those for Gen-X. This shows that some of the cultural values have predictive potential on career goal of the cohort employees.

Inferential analysis shows that conservation, self-enhancement, and self-transcendence significantly influence career goal of Gen-Y, while self-enhancement and conservation were the significant predictors of career goal of Gen-X employees. However, only two cultural values were found to be stronger in explaining variances in the career goal of Gen-X compared to the three cultural value factors for Gen-Y. Specifically, conservation, self-enhancement, and self-transcendence together seemed to be relatively meaningful to explain the career goal among Gen-Y because this group of employees have high self-esteem and are more likely to consider the importance of stability with the society, and will strive to strengthen their career behaviors. As Gen-Y had high career aspirations (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009) because they are in the exploration and development stages of career, they tend to focus on maintaining their status quo with the appropriate cultural values while moving towards achieving their career goal. With the increasingly transitory nature of work, the reduction in lifelong employment and the manifestation of non-organizational careers consisting of free-floating job, self-employment and flexible in career options, younger employees are more likely to be aware of what they aspire to in terms of their future careers. In addition, the impatience and increased mobility of younger generation employees will manifest itself in higher influence of cultural values on career goal. Hence, this confirms the conclusion by Westerman and Yamamura (2007) that rather than passively relying on employers to take responsibility for career development, the younger generation employees are more likely to take a more active role in their career planning and execution including career goal as they still have a longer journey to go in careers compared to Gen-X employees.

Self-enhancement and conservation are found to be significant predictors of career goal of Gen-X because they dislike close supervision and prefer freedom at the workplace (Codrington, 2011). They will likely work to have a life and support the pursuit of individual interest as well as improving of their career behaviors. Since Gen-X had been described as self-reliant individuals (Crampton & Hodge, 2007; Lowe et al., 2008), they tended to prioritize power and being ambitious so that they could make good career decisions. However, it should be noted that Gen-X employees are those aged 36 and over, many of them have already reached the peak of their careers. It might be that two or three decades ago they would have described other types of career goal. As such, this could be considered as a limitation of the study using the generation cohorts. However, this limitation outweighs the benefits in knowing specific employee differences based on age groups at a point in time using a cross-sectional procedure.

The study, despite its limitations, found several differences in describing the influence of cultural values on career goal of both generational cohorts. This knowledge is important for human resource professionals, career counselors and managers to manage an aspect of employee diversity according to the influence of cultural values on career goal. Hence, discussing values from the perspective of Gen-X and Gen-Y would

help managers to formulate intervention appropriate with career development program by incorporating two common cultural values of conservation and self-enhancement, also taking into account the significant contribution of self-transcendence (e.g. altruism, universalism, and benevolence) to career goal of Gen-Y when planning activities such as training and development, induction program, on-the-job training, mentoring, celebration for achievements, and quality maintenance initiatives.

Future research lines are suggested, for instance, to delve into the influence of gender on cultural values and career goals (Hirschi & Fischer, 2013) of the generational cohorts as women take on career roles at different life-cycle stages, and there is a significant ratio of women workers *vis-à-vis* men workers in the oil and gas, ICT, and banking and insurance companies. This study should be replicated in other industries such as research and development institutes, and heavy automotive industries considering the growing expansion of these sectors in Malaysia. The replication with a higher number of respondents is suggested to enable the use of more sophisticated statistical procedures such as structural equation modelling. Following this, it is recommended to replace the generation cohorts of Gen-X and Gen-Y with stages of career and use the latter as a moderator in relating cultural values and career goals. Another direction might be to replicate this study in other emerging economies in Asia and Europe. Finally, future research may use the four dimensions of career goal as separate dependent variables of career goal instead of one.

The importance of cultural values and career goal was reflected by the generational cohorts' attempts to bring themselves into the alignment with what they want to be in their future careers, as suggested by the SCCT. Therefore, these variables seemed to be useful in contributing to the use of SCCT with regard to career behaviors within the specific industrial workplace contexts in Malaysia.

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