

# The Millennial Generation: A New Breed of Labour?

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## Abstract

This article puts to the test the notion that younger generations, most notably the Millennials, value work less than older generations do. The analysis, deploying a linear probability model, is based on Statistics Finland's Quality of Work Life Surveys, 1984 to 2013. Focusing on labour market entrants aged 15 to 29, we address two main themes: the value given to work, leisure and family life, and work commitment. Regardless of age, the value given to work has remained consistently high for the past three decades. At the same time, leisure and family life have gained increasing importance, not only among the Millennials but also among older generations. The Millennials are more prepared to change to a different occupational field than older employees, but this is not a new tendency, and therefore the generational gap remains unaffected. The evidence does not support the argument that the Millennials are less work-oriented than older generations.

## Keywords

Generation Y, Millennials, work attitudes, work commitment, work orientation, work values

## Introduction

Defining generations and exploring their differences is a subject of much current debate that involves both political and economic interests. In the employment context, one area of special interest has been the recent generational shift, which has seen the arrival in the workplace of the first digital natives, “native speakers” of the digital language (Abrams & von Frank, 2014; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Ng, Lyons, & Schweitzer, 2012; Tapscott, 1998; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 1999).

Finland presents an interesting case in this context as the population here is aging more rapidly than in other Western countries (Laine & Maiväli, 2010; The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD], 2016a). By the 2010s, baby boomers have exited the labour market. In Finland, the baby boom generation comprises those who were born in 1945 to 1950, while in the United Kingdom and the United States, for instance, post-war fertility rates remained elevated into the 1960s (Karisto, 2007). There are still people in Finnish workplaces who were born in the 1950s, but for the most part, the population of working age consists of younger and relatively small cohorts.

The focus in this article is on Generation Y or the Millennials who were born in or after the 1980s and who entered the labour market in the 2000s. They are higher educated than earlier generations, highly competent users of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and accustomed to the world of social media (Deal, Altman, & Rogelberg, 2010; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Kowske, Rasch, & Wiley, 2010). We compare the Millennials with the

following older generations: the Welfare State Generation and Generation X, the young adults of the 1980s and 1990s.

These three generations started their employment careers in very different economic climates. The young adults who joined the Finnish labour market in the 1980s completed their occupational training at a time when the expansion of the welfare state was at its height and the job market was exceptionally strong (Pyöriä, Melin, & Blom, 2005). This trend was halted by the 1990s recession, and young people's future prospects were effectively hampered by mass unemployment. In the early 2000s, normalcy was restored in the labour market, but there was no return to the exceptionally high employment rates of the 1980s (Pyöriä & Ojala, 2016).

So does Generation Y, the Millennials who are now entering the labour market, differ from the generations that went before? There have been some quite far-fetched interpretations of the distinctiveness of this generation. For instance, it has been suggested that young people do not value traditional wage employment to the same extent as their parents (Cogin, 2012; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). The Millennials generation, it is argued, expects to be able to work under a new management culture, to contribute to innovation at the

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workplace level, and to reconcile work and leisure in novel ways (Chou, 2012; Twenge & Campbell, 2012).

Furthermore, it is said the Millennials attach more value to family life and to leisure than they do to wage employment (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010). It is thought that they are less committed than older wage earners to one single employer, and that they place more value on opportunities for personal growth and development than on lifelong employment (Broadbridge, Maxwell, & Ogden, 2007). The Millennials are keen to shape and influence the culture, practices, and management of their current workplace and to find a job with social relevance (Terjesen, Vinnicombe, & Freeman, 2007; Twenge, 2010).

Insofar as these characterizations are accurate, it is clear that work organizations and management are going to have to make changes, both in staff recruitment and in other areas (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade, 2012). As more and more workplaces face the challenge of integrating the newest working generation with older colleagues, the work environment may encounter productivity challenges if changes are not made to accommodate employees with different attitudes and expectations (Stewart, Oliver, Cravens, & Oishi, 2017). In the future, the most competent and skilled staff will want to work for companies that embrace corporate social responsibility rather than traditional owner-driven thinking (McGlone, Spain, & McGlone, 2011). In these kinds of companies, employees will have the best opportunities to grow and develop themselves, to realize themselves in their own terms within an inspiring workplace community, and to build up a personal experience of a good and meaningful job.

However, we do not yet know whether the values of the Millennials really are as different as has been suggested. Representative surveys with extensive data sets on the work orientation of this generation are still scarce (Giancola, 2006; Macky, Gardner, & Forsyth, 2008). In particular, it is hard to find studies that compare the Millennials with young people of the 1980s and 1990s and that control for age and time-period effects (Kowske et al., 2010; Krahn & Galambos, 2014; Parry & Urwin, 2011). Our article is intended to fill this gap in the research literature. We have a unique and comprehensive data set spanning three full decades.

Using data collected by Statistics Finland in 1984 to 2013, our aim is to find out how labour market entrants aged 15 to 29 and born at different times differ from each other. Our main focus is on how these people value wage employment and other areas of life, that is, family and leisure, as well as on their readiness to change jobs. Drawing on the tradition of sociological generation research, we ask whether it is possible to identify age group differences in attitudes to wage employment over the past three decades.

## Defining the Generations

The concept of generation has two basic meanings. Generation may refer either to a familial generation or to a

social generation, that is, a cohort of people born in the same date range. However, a cohort does not constitute a generation by virtue of its age alone, other than in a statistical sense. In the sociological use of the concept, a generation is thought to consist of a stratum who are born within a limited time range and who share not only the same date of birth but also similar sociocultural experiences (Edmunds & Turner, 2002; Eyerman & Turner, 1998).

In his famous essay *The Problem of Generations*, German sociologist of science Karl Mannheim (1952) identifies three stages of generation formation. The first premise for the formation of a generation is membership of the same age group, but that alone is not enough. In addition, there must exist some social and cultural factor that most people in the age group share in common. Mannheim says that youth is a particularly strategic time for the development of generational consciousness. He also realized that the key experience shared by a certain cohort at once unites and divides generations. For instance, the 1990s recession divided Finland's Generation X youths who had been born two decades earlier into two groups, the survivors and the marginalized (Kalela, Kiander, Kivikuru, Loikkanen, & Simpura, 2001).

In the third stage of generation formation, people from a certain age cohort are drawn together to pursue a common goal or way of life. The generation is mobilized. For instance, young people in the 1960s were brought together by student radicalism and left-wing activism (Kolbe, 2008). However, Mannheim's mobilized generation is a problematic concept for purposes of analysing the age groups in focus here. As a result of the recession, Generation X did not go to the barricades in protest against mass unemployment and public sector cutbacks, even though the economic crisis became a key experience for them. The Welfare State Generation had no real reason to be radicalized, either.

The Millennials generation is even harder to define in Mannheim's terms. New social movements such as environmental and animal welfare groups, anti-economic globalization groups and the precariat movement, for instance, have all proved to be too fragmented and too marginal to be able to mobilize today's youth, or even to provide them a common point of experience. Young people in today's Finland can be described as a culturally "atomised" generation (Salasuo & Poikolainen, 2016).

In contrast to Mannheim, many present-day scholars do not consider mobilization to be central to the development of intragenerational and intergenerational divisions (France & Roberts, 2015; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). A discursively shared world of experiences suffices to unite and to divide generations and at once to explain generational differences (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014; Kupperschmidt, 2000). Indeed, most studies define generation as a group whose members share a common experience and an awareness of the distinctiveness of their own age cohort vis-à-vis others (Costanza et al., 2012; Parry & Urwin, 2011).

We have here chosen to follow the post-Mannheimian interpretation. As well as comparing Millennials with older generations, we also explore the shared world of experiences of those cohorts born since the early 1980s. Our analysis is focused on work orientation, that is, on individual values and attitudes related to wage employment, but we also consider the traits and characteristics of the Millennial generation more widely.

The concept of work orientation was originally established by British sociologist John Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer, and Platt (1968) in their classical study *The Affluent Worker*. Work orientation reflects the meaning of work to the trajectory of the individual's life course more broadly. A distinction is typically made between three types of work orientation: an employee with an instrumental orientation to work regards work primarily as a source of income, an employee with a bureaucratic orientation is committed to career development, and an employee with a solidarity orientation identifies with the workplace community.

There are other theories of work orientation (see, for example, Turunen, 2011), but Goldthorpe's broad view is in line with generation research. It is useful to compare attitudes to work with other important life values, in our case family and leisure (see also Alkula, 1990). The value attached to different spheres of life is not a zero-sum game, but those spheres constitute a mutually complementary network that structures the individual's life trajectory.

## Research Questions and Data

Our analysis is divided into two main themes: (a) the value attributed to wage employment, home and family life, and leisure; and (b) readiness to change jobs in either the same or different occupational field. We want to find out how young labour market entrants have differed in these respects over the past three decades (the survey items are detailed in Appendix A).

The analysis is based on pooled data from Statistics Finland's Quality of Work Life Surveys collected in 1984, 1990, 1997, 2003, 2008, and 2013. These are extensive cross-sectional studies with a very high response rate (68%–89%), involving between 3,000 and 5,000 people and covering the entire wage and salary earning population residing in Finland. The surveys have been conducted in the form of personal face-to-face interviews, lasting on average a little over an hour (Lehto & Sutela, 2009; Sutela & Lehto, 2014).

Cross-sectional studies often explain attitudes to work by reference to age rather than generation (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008). Here, by contrast, we want to compare the attitudes of people representing different generations when they were the same age in the early stages of their employment careers. At each cross-sectional point, we focus on examining wage earners aged 15 to 29 and compare them with all older age groups (30–64). The research literature has no unambiguous definition for young wage earners (Eurofound, 2013). We justify our choice of age limits here based on Finnish employees' high

level of education. In particular, the average age of university graduation in Finland—around 26 to 28 years—is higher than in other European countries.

Because of the cross-sectional time points there is some overlap in the dates of the generations in focus, but in view of the limitations of the data set these dates are quite closely in line with those used in the earlier research literature. It is important to bear in mind that there is no consensus about how generations are defined. Generation X is usually defined as comprising people born in the late 1960s and 1970s, and the Millennials as those born later. Howe and Strauss (1997, 2000), for instance, define the Millennials generation as comprising those born in 1982 to 2004 (cf. Smola & Sutton, 2002).

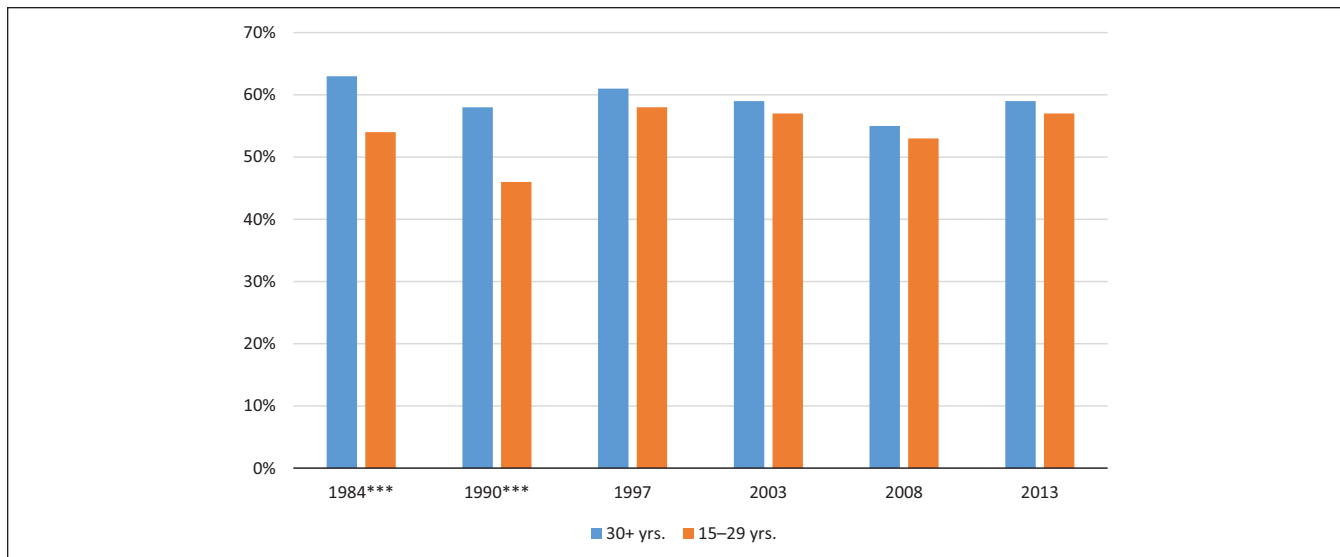
At our time points, young people in 2013 belong to the Millennials generation (those born in 1984–1998), and young people in the 1997 data set belong to Generation X (born in 1968–1982). The young people included in the 1984 data set are described as the Welfare State Generation; they were born in 1955 to 1969. During this period, Finland became urbanized, the business and industry structure was modernized, and Finland developed into a fully-fledged Nordic welfare state (Pyöriä et al., 2005).

Although our decision to focus on the age group 15 to 29 is in line with the age bands used in earlier research, this demarcation is not without its problems. All the cohorts in our data set do not constitute a generation. The young people in the 1990, 2003, and 2008 data sets fall in the middle ground between the generational categories outlined above. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the generational consciousness of the youngest respondents in our material is still in the process of developing, and their work orientation may reflect a more general understanding of the meaning of work rather than their own personal experiences from the world of work. However, young people aged 15 are officially of working age, and our data set represents comprehensively even the very youngest wage earners (Lehto & Sutela, 2009; Sutela & Lehto, 2014).

In numerical terms, though, our data set includes only few people from the youngest age group. This is because the sample was collected among wage earners, and most younger people are still studying. The 1984 data set comprises 1,324 wage earners aged 15 to 29 (29% of all respondents). At later cross-sectional time points the figures are lower, reflecting the rapid aging of the population: 1,048 in 1990 (26%), 594 in 1997 (20%), 778 in 2003 (19%), 814 in 2008 (19%), and 744 in 2013 (15%). In each year, women and men are equally represented among the wage earners aged 15 to 29.

## Method

The following empirical investigation is based on linear regression analysis. We use a linear probability model (LPM), that is, a basic general linear model (GLM) with binary dependent variables. In the context of our inquiry, this offers considerable advantages over logistic regression, the method most typically used in the social sciences.



**Figure 1.** Value attached to gainful employment (very important) in 1984-2013 (%).

In logistic regression, the odds ratios are not easy to understand intuitively, and they are often mistaken for probabilities, which they are not. LPMs, in contrast, allow for the assessment of the possibility of an event (on a scale from 0 to 1, the mean estimates practically refer to shares as percentages). They can also be used to compare results across groups, samples, and time points (Mood, 2010), making the method particularly suitable for the present analysis. According to Hellevik (2009), the violation of the linearity assumption between independent and dependent variables can, where necessary, be overcome by dichotomizing independent variables. The potential violation of homoscedasticity assumption with linear models does not seem to be of practical importance because the basic tests used with these kinds of models are robust (Hellevik, 2009). Furthermore, LPMs enable more intuitive analysis of within-group differences (here carried out with *F* tests, post hoc tests, and by analysing the means within groups when statistically significant differences are found).

The individual factors controlled for in our empirical model are age group (those aged 15-29 and older), gender, and level of education (basic, secondary, and higher). Family status (partnership and children under 18) is taken into account in the analyses concerning the value attached to different areas of life (family status shows little correlation with intentions to change jobs). Since our focus is on younger people, we also adjust for whether or not the respondent is studying while working in gainful employment. Furthermore, we consider whether the respondent has only recently entered the labour market, and adjust for the number of years in gainful employment (newcomers 0-2 years).

We describe the respondent's labour market position by taking into account the type of employment contract (temporary contract), perceived threats to the security of employment (one or more of the following: threat of layoff, dismissal or unemployment), perceived opportunities for employment in the open

labour market, a spell of unemployment during the preceding 5-year period, and income level (classified annually into income tertiles). Furthermore, we consider whether the job is varied or monotonous. We also control for the cross-sectional time point.

We are aware of the difficulty of inferring, in a cross-sectional context, whether the phenomenon in focus is explained by age, cohort, or time-period effects (Krahn & Galambos, 2014; Yang & Land, 2008). Therefore, in Tables 1 and 2, we examine how each age group differs from older respondents as an interaction between age and time point. Furthermore, we examine the interactions for age and educational level, gender, simultaneous studying and working, and recent entry into the labour market (0-2 years). Not only age and time point but also age and education as well as age and gender, produced noteworthy interactions, and therefore they were included in the final model. To establish the impact of the time point, we studied the above three interactions with post hoc tests (Appendix B).

The background variables in the model do not correlate too strongly with one another, and therefore there are no multicollinearity problems caused by excessively high correlations (Appendix C). Only age and "newcomer" status correlated at the level of 0.4, which is somewhat high, but not a barrier to keeping both variables in the model. Chi-square significance values were set as follows:  $*p \leq .05$ ,  $**p \leq .01$ ,  $***p \leq .001$ .

## Results

### Young Adults' Work Orientation

Generations are most commonly referred to in the context of political debates where different age groups are pitted against one another. More often than not, it is young people who come out as the underdogs. Not only in Finland

**Table 1.** Value Attached to Gainful Employment, Family, and Leisure in 1984-2013.

	Considers the following aspects of life very important					
	Gainful employment		Family		Leisure	
	Mean 0-1 (SE)	F(df) Sig.	Mean 0-1 (SE)	F(df) Sig.	Mean 0-1 (SE)	F(df) Sig.
Grand mean	.502 (.011) (= estimated 50%)		.820 (.007) (= estimated 82%)		.383 (.010) (= estimated 38%)	
Age						
15-29 years		Ns	.837 (.008)	25.798(1)***	.409 (.011)	35.289(1)***
30-64 years			.801 (.008)		.351 (.011)	
Time point						
1984	.512 (.013)	9.839(5)***	.728 (.009)	111.446(5)***	.287 (.012)	84.771(5)***
1990	.449 (.014)		.752 (.009)		.311 (.013)	
1997	.534 (.014)		.814 (.010)		.339 (.014)	
2003	.501 (.014)		.898 (.010)		.387 (.013)	
2008	.485 (.014)		.859 (.010)		.473 (.013)	
2013	.527 (.014)		.864 (.010)		.482 (.013)	
Post hoc <sup>a</sup>	1990, 2008 < 1984, 1997, 2003, 2013		1984 < 1990 < 1997 < 2003, 2008, 2013		1984 < 1990, 1997 < 2003 < 2008, 2013	
Interaction term Age × Year		3.317(5)** <sup>b</sup>		2.523(5)** <sup>b</sup>		ns
Interaction term Age × Education		6.011(2)** <sup>b</sup>		ns		ns
Interaction term Age × Gender		12.829(1)*** <sup>b</sup>		19.254(1)*** <sup>b</sup>		ns
Education						
Basic	.526 (.012)	6.426(2)**		ns	.353 (.012)	8.092(2)***
Secondary	.500 (.011)				.384 (.010)	
Higher	.478 (.014)				.402 (.013)	
Post hoc <sup>a</sup>	Basic > Secondary > High				Basic < Secondary < High	
Gender						
Woman	.490 (.011)	7.904(1)**	.872 (.008)	363.416(1)***	.359 (.011)	29.845(1)***
Man	.513 (.012)		.767 (.008)		.401 (.011)	
Spouse						
Yes	.474 (.011)	52.074(1)***	.914 (.008)	1,352.706(1)***	.359 (.011)	35.089(1)***
No	.529 (.011)		.724 (.008)		.401 (.011)	
Children						
Yes		Ns	.873 (.008)	509.369(1)***	.325 (.011)	276.190(1)***
No			.766 (.007)		.435 (.010)	
Employed during studies						
Yes	.456 (.016)	32.550(1)***		ns	.413 (.016)	20.092(1)***
No	.547 (.009)				.346 (.009)	
Years employed						
0-2 years	.460 (.016)	23.492(1)***		ns		ns
3+ years	.542 (.010)					
Type of employment						
Temporary	.487 (.012)	7.966(1)**		ns		ns
Permanent	.516 (.011)					
Threats						
1-3 threats		ns		ns	.372 (.010)	4.720(1)*
No threats					.388 (.010)	
Has been unemployed						
Yes	.512 (.012)	6.022(1)*		ns	.368 (.011)	8.692(1)**
No	.491 (.011)				.392 (.010)	
Employability						
Poor		ns		ns		ns
Good						

(continued)



**Table 1. (continued)**

	Considers the following aspects of life very important					
	Gainful employment		Family		Leisure	
	Mean 0-1 (SE)	F(df) Sig.	Mean 0-1 (SE)	F(df) Sig.	Mean 0-1 (SE)	F(df) Sig.
Job content						
Monotonous	.487 (.012)	11.456(1)***		ns		ns
Varied	.516 (.011)					
Wage level						
Lowest tertile	.470 (.011)	29.557(2)***		ns	.362 (.010)	7.426(2)***
Middle tertile	.492 (.012)				.381 (.011)	
Highest tertile	.542 (.013)				.397 (.012)	
Post hoc <sup>a</sup>	Low < Middle < High				Low < High	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		.019		.141		.057
Model F(df) Sig.		17.930(28)***		143.931(28)***		53.377(28)***
N		24.353		24.353		24.353

Note. Linear probability model with ANOVA mean estimates. For dummy variables, the post hoc results are the same than F test results.

<sup>a</sup>Post hoc comparisons (Sidak adjustments) shown when statistically significant within groups at p value level ≤ .05.

<sup>b</sup>See Appendix B for further analysis.

**Table 2. Readiness to Change Jobs in the Same or a Different Occupational Field in 1984-2013.**

	Would change jobs for the same pay to:					
	The same/a different field		The same field		A different field	
	Mean 0-1 (SE)	F(df) Sig.	Mean 0-1 (SE)	F(df) Sig.	Mean 0-1 (SE)	F(df) Sig.
Grand mean	.583 (.011) (= estimated 58%)		.223 (.009) (= estimated 22%)		.360 (.009) (= estimated 36%)	
Age						
15-29 years	.610 (.012)	28.705(1)***		ns	.388 (.010)	31.395(1)***
30-64 years	.554 (.012)				.336 (.010)	
Time point						
1984	.587 (.013)	10.627(5)***	.239 (.011)	6.724(5)***	.349 (.011)	6.051(5)***
1990	.636 (.014)		.241 (.011)		.395 (.012)	
1997	.586 (.014)		.239 (.012)		.348 (.013)	
2003	.537 (.014)		.196 (.012)		.340 (.012)	
2008	.572 (.014)		.209 (.012)		.363 (.012)	
2013	.575 (.014)		.199 (.012)		.376 (.013)	
Post hoc <sup>a</sup>	1990 > 1997, 2008, 2013 > 2003 1984 < 1990		1984, 2003, 2013 < 1990, 1997		2003 < 1984, 2008 < 1990, 2013 1997 < 1990, 2013	
Interaction term Age × Year		ns		ns		2.243(5) <sup>*b</sup>
Interaction term Age × Education		16.370(2)*** <sup>b</sup>		ns		17.750(2)*** <sup>b</sup>
Interaction term Age × Gender		11.573(1)*** <sup>b</sup>		ns		4.170(1) <sup>*b</sup>
Education						
Basic	.565 (.012)	3.561(2)*	.186 (.010)	20.183(2)***	.379 (.011)	9.481(2)***
Secondary	.592 (.011)		.219 (.009)		.373 (.010)	
Higher	.590 (.014)		.257 (.012)		.333 (.012)	
Post hoc <sup>a</sup>	Basic < Secondary < High		Basic < Secondary < High		Basic < Secondary < High	
Gender						
Woman	.600 (.011)	19.126(1)***	.196 (.010)	54.527(1)***		ns
Man	.564 (.012)		.245 (.009)			
Spouse						
Yes	.567 (.011)	15.408(1)***		ns	.345 (.010)	23.560(1)***
No	.597 (.012)				.378 (.010)	

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

	Would change jobs for the same pay to:					
	The same/a different field		The same field		A different field	
	Mean 0-1 (SE)	F(df) Sig.	Mean 0-1 (SE)	F(df) Sig.	Mean 0-1 (SE)	F(df) Sig.
Children						
Yes	.607 (.012)	52.000(1)***		ns	.385 (.010)	56.557(1)***
No	.557 (.011)				.339 (.009)	
Employed during studies						
Yes		ns		ns		ns
No						
Years employed						
0-2 years		ns		ns		ns
3+ years						
Type of employment						
Temporary	.564 (.012)	11.990(1)***	.246 (.010)	36.331(1)***	.318 (.011)	91.312(1)***
Permanent	.600 (.011)		.195 (.009)		.406 (.010)	
Threats						
1-3 threats	.646 (.012)	269.650(1)***	.252 (.010)	96.271(1)***	.394 (.010)	90.080(1)***
No threats	.518 (.011)		.189 (.009)		.329 (.010)	
Has been unemployed						
Yes		ns		ns		ns
No						
Employability						
Poor	.573 (.012)	6.470(1)*	.184 (.010)	141.521(1)***	.389 (.011)	67.429(1)***
Good	.592 (.010)		.257 (.009)		.335 (.009)	
Job content						
Monotonous	.679 (.012)	532.785(1)***	.205 (.010)	18.908(1)***	.474 (.011)	916.061(1)***
Varied	.485 (.011)		.236 (.009)		.250 (.009)	
Wage level						
Lowest tertile	.548 (.011)	21.397(2)***	.199 (.009)	13.407(2)***	.349 (.010)	4.147(2)*
Middle tertile	.594 (.012)		.225 (.010)		.370 (.010)	
Highest tertile	.604 (.013)		.238 (.010)		.366 (.011)	
Post hoc <sup>a</sup>	Low < High		Low < Middle < High		Low < Middle < High	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.047		.027		.059	
Model F(df) Sig.	44.136(28)***		25.317(28)***		55.941(28)***	
N	24.353		24.353		24.353	

Note. Linear probability model with ANOVA mean estimates. For dummy variables, the post hoc results are the same than *F* test results.

<sup>a</sup>Post hoc comparisons (Sidak adjustments) shown when statistically significant within groups at *p* value level ≤ .05.

<sup>b</sup>See Appendix B for further analysis.

but throughout Europe and rest of the world there is growing concern about youth unemployment, the length of time that young people spend studying, and young people's attitudes to work (Eurofound, 2013; France, 2016; Helve & Evans, 2013; Ng, Lyons, & Schweitzer, 2017).

In reality, young people in Finland, including students, are an important part of the labour force, and they have important skills and the right kind of attitude. One distinctive feature of the Finnish education system is that many students gain valuable work experience while they are still studying. Even though young people in Finland complete their education (and higher education in particular) at a later age than young people in Europe on average, they quickly

settle into a career path that matches their skills and qualifications (Kivinen & Nurmi, 2014).

Our results show there are no grounds for concern over young people's work orientation: It is not growing weaker. During the periods under study, the appreciation of gainful employment has remained constant even among young people, although they have consistently attached slightly less value to work than older people. Over half of the age group 15 to 29 valued work as a very important area of life at every time point in our data set, except for 1990, which saw a temporary dip in the value attached to gainful employment (Figure 1).

In 1990, the economy was still benefiting from strong cyclical trends and a climate of optimism, but in 1991 to

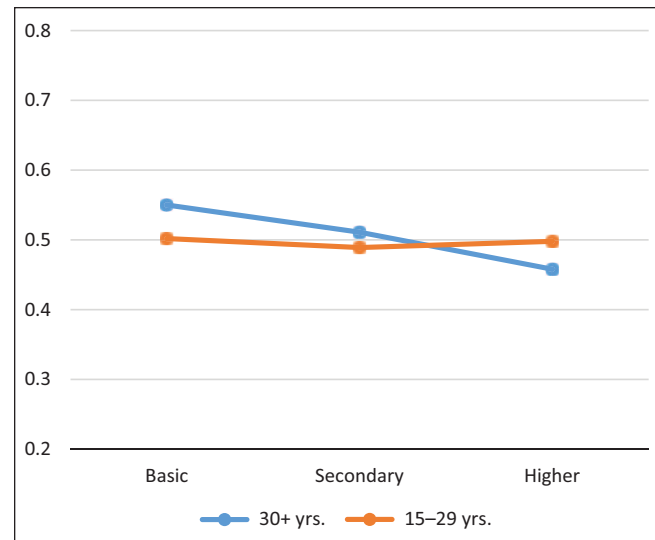
1993 the economy collapsed and the country drifted into mass unemployment. It seems that the general trend in the appreciation of gainful employment closely follows the cyclical movements of the economy. When the times are good, the value attached to employment falls, and vice versa. This is confirmed by the model presented in Table 1. The post hoc test shows that both time points that represent the zenith of economic upturn—1990 and 2008—have statistically significantly lowered levels of value given to gainful employment in comparison to all other time points.

When interpreting the results, it is important to observe that young people aged 15 to 29 and older age groups differ statistically significantly in their appreciation of gainful employment only in 1984 and 1990, but not in later years (Figure 1). In the model presented in Table 1, no direct effect of age was found. The generational difference that was visible in Figure 1 is confirmed only for 1990, when interactions are examined between age group and time point (Appendix B). In other words, it can be said that in the 1980s, the Welfare State Generation attached somewhat less value to employment than older age groups, but in the case of Generations X and Y, the difference is not statistically significant. The evidence, therefore, does not support the suggestions that young people's work orientation is growing weaker.

It is somewhat surprising that a higher education does not predict a high appreciation of work, but on the contrary the association tends to weaken (Table 1). Those with a basic education attach more value to gainful employment than those with a higher education (see also Stam, Verbakel, & De Graaf, 2013). This ties in with the rising overall level of education. In the 2013 data set, 46% of the respondents had a tertiary degree, compared with just 13% in 1984. In Finland, educational achievement is no longer as significant a factor as it used to be. Although education continues to provide protection against labour market risks (Koerselman & Uusitalo, 2014; Pyöriä & Ojala, 2016), unemployment has increased among the higher educated, too, which probably explains our result.

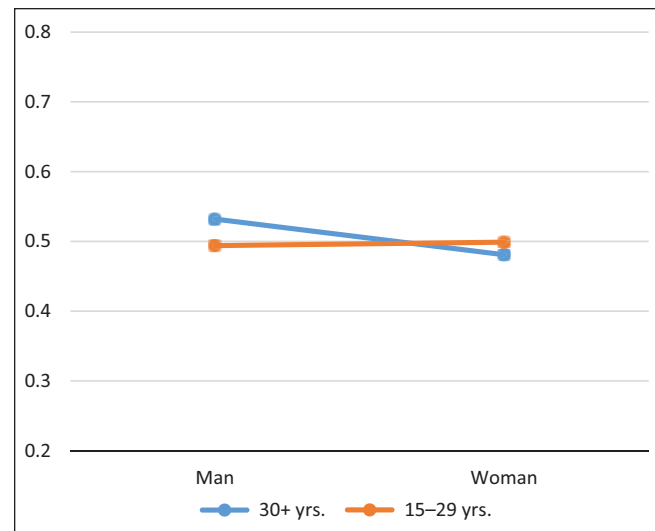
The interaction between age and education is significant in the model shown in Table 1. The more detailed analysis in Appendix B reveals an interesting feature about the differentiation of young people's work orientation by educational level. That is, young people aged 15 to 29 with a basic education value employment less than older age groups with the same level of education. Among young people with a tertiary degree, the situation is the exact opposite. They value gainful employment more than older people with a tertiary degree (Figure 2). We assume that an effort given to studying for a higher degree at a young age is reflected in this finding: Higher educated labour market newcomers are keen to start their careers.

According to Table 1, men value work more than women do. Here, however, we find an interesting interaction effect concerning age. Whereas younger men value employment less than older male employees, the quite opposite holds for younger



**Figure 2.** Estimated share of employees valuing gainful employment as “very important” (scale 0 = less, 1 = very important).

Note. Illustration of the post hoc test finding on Age × Education (Table 1; Appendix B).



**Figure 3.** Estimated share of employees valuing gainful employment as “very important” (scale 0 = less, 1 = very important).

Note. Illustration of the post hoc test finding on Gender × Education (Table 1; Appendix B).

women: Older female employees respect work less than their younger colleagues. At the same time, between young men and women, the gender difference does not exist (Figure 3).

Table 1 also shows that there is a statistically highly significant difference between a high level of earnings and a high appreciation of employment: The higher the wages, the more people value their work. Simultaneous employment and studying and a short experience of gainful employment (less than 2 years), on the other hand, reduce the value attached to employment. People not living in a partnership



value work more, but it makes no difference whether or not the respondent has children.

### *Work Orientation in Relation to Family and Leisure*

Next, we move on to examine the appreciation of employment in relation to the importance attached to family and leisure. Although we are primarily interested in attitudes to work, the inclusion of family and leisure in the same model allows us to analyze areas of life that complement work orientation. This choice is in line with Goldthorpe's theory. Goldthorpe et al. (1968) understood that the development of work orientation is associated with the individual's social and cultural background and with the values adopted in that context.

The most significant generational difference stems from the emphasis placed by young people on family and leisure, even though the most significant background factor of having a family is taken into account. It is worth noting, however, that from 1984 to 2013, the value attached to family and to leisure has increased among all wage earners (the post hoc results presented in Table 1 point to almost linear increase up to 2003 concerning family, and up to 2008 concerning leisure). A modest interaction effect between age and time point shows that in recent years (2003, 2008, and 2013, see Appendix B) young people attach more value to family in comparison to older generations. The interaction term on gender shows that young women in particular value their family highly (age difference is not found among men, however, see Appendix B).

The results described above reflect a more general change in values that probably have to do with increasing overall wealth and affluence. We have witnessed a growing trend toward post-materialistic values in affluent economies (Inglehart, 1997, 2008). This is confirmed by the observation that people with a higher education and with the highest incomes tend to attach more value to leisure (see post hoc results for education and wage level, Table 1). In Goldthorpe et al.'s (1968) terms, work no longer has the same instrumental value that it did before, at least for people who have the most resources to invest in their leisure.

Unfortunately, we were unable to incorporate in our model an indicator describing job satisfaction, because the data set is not fully comparable in this respect (in 1990 job satisfaction was inquired in a slightly different way than in other years). We can, however, observe on the basis of our data and earlier research that job satisfaction does matter to wage earners of all ages (see also Kowske et al., 2010; Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). If people are not satisfied with their job, then both their work orientation and the value they attach to the family will decline. The most crucial factor is how work and family are reconciled. Even though it is difficult to establish a potential causative link, low job satisfaction and a pessimistic future outlook probably reflect adversely on the individual's family life. If, on the other hand, people are doing well at work, they are more likely to

enjoy a good family life as well (Hakanen, Peeters, & Perhoniemi, 2011; Ylikännö, 2010).

All in all, the appreciation of wage employment has remained quite stable over the past three decades. At the same time, both family and especially leisure have gained significantly in importance. Family and leisure are most important of all to young people, but this has not undermined the value attached to gainful employment. This can be interpreted by suggesting that young people are keen to have both diversity and balance in their lives.

### *Readiness to Change Jobs*

Next, we move on to the question of work commitment from the point of view of readiness to change jobs, assuming that the respondent would be able to change jobs for the same pay. According to Table 2, young people are keener to change jobs than older age groups, namely, to different occupational fields, even when studying and limited work experience (less than 2 years) are adjusted for. This result reflects young people's life situation. Youth has always been a stage of life characterized by transition and search for direction (Helve & Evans, 2013). Young people need to find their place in the labour market, weigh educational options, and try out their wings in different occupations.

It is useful to look at the interactions more closely to find out what they reveal about the readiness to change jobs. First, there are statistically significant interactions for age and educational level that focus on aims at changing jobs to a different occupational field (Table 2; Appendix B). Young people aged 15 to 29 with a basic and secondary education are more likely to contemplate changing jobs than older age groups. Among the tertiary educated, there is no corresponding statistically significant age group difference.

Second, there is a gender and age differentiation on overall aims at changing jobs, and on aims at changing to a different field. The interaction effect points to young women who are more prepared to change jobs as compared to women aged 30 or more (Appendix B). Among men, the age gap is lower.

Third, there is a minor interaction effect that differentiates between age and time point among young employees (Appendix B). It seems that representatives of the Welfare State Generation and Generation X, at ages 15 to 29, were more willing than older wage earners to change jobs to a different occupational field. Surprisingly, we found no confirmation for our assumptions that Generation Y is willing to change jobs, even though young people today are showing greater individuality than before in their transitions from education to the labour market, and even though they are better placed than before to make independent choices and even to get employers to compete for their services to secure a better contract and to pledge their commitment. On the contrary, the results seem to indicate that the Millennials are highly committed to the workplace, once they have found their own field.

Concerning other measures that are adjusted for, readiness to change jobs is most strongly predicted by the nature of the job, that is, job monotony and threats to employment security

(Table 2). A temporary contract adds to people's readiness to change jobs within the same occupational field, but reduces intentions to move to another occupational field. One possible explanation could lie in this distinctive feature of the Finnish labour market: Temporary contracts are most common among highly educated public sector employees. Professionals, nurses, social workers, and teachers, for instance, must all have a higher degree to work in Finland. For them, moving to another occupational field is not a realistic option, but they will first and foremost want to find a permanent job within their own field. This is supported by the observation in Table 2 which shows that people with a tertiary degree are particularly keen to find another job within their own field. This result points at professional closures within the academic labour market.

All in all, the results indicate that neither young nor old people are a homogeneous group. Work commitment varies by work content and educational level both among younger and older wage earners.

## Conclusion and Discussion

In this article, we have discussed the work orientation, appreciation of family and leisure, and the workplace commitment of young people in Finland over the past three decades. The life-world of the Welfare State Generation who lived their youth in the 1980s was structured by a rising educational level, the growth of white-collar employment and a general climate of optimism. During the economic upturn of the 1980s, people transitioned quickly from graduation to a stable labour market position.

Born in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Generation X entered the labour market in a very different situation compared with both those who were born one decade earlier and those who came a decade later. Generation X grew up into adulthood in the shadow of the 1990s great recession. Their key experiences were mass unemployment and the growth of social inequalities (Kalela et al., 2001). The Millennials who transitioned into adulthood in the 2000s entered a labour market where normalcy had been restored, but again this generation experienced increasing uncertainty as a result of the financial crisis that started to unfold in late 2008 (Pyöriä & Ojala, 2016). Despite the financial crisis, the Finnish labour market has continued to perform quite well, and there has been no new wave of mass unemployment: In the age group 15 to 29, too, unemployment has remained below the EU average (Eurofound, 2013).

During the period under review, the mobilization of young people in Finland, in Mannheim's sense, has remained very limited. The Welfare State Generation has had no reason to mobilize. Generation X, who grew up in the shadow of the 1990s recession, would have had good reason to become radicalized, but these young people did not go to the barricades. The great recession certainly left its mark on them, but it did not diminish their commitment to wage employment. In the case of Generation Y, too, there has been little more than marginal mobilization, and for this generation it is even difficult to identify a shared key experience.

The Millennials share in common a high level of competence in ICT and social media use, but this is an experience that cuts across age group boundaries. Finland is a highly advanced information society and all working age people use ICTs more or less regularly. New social movements have also been quite fragmented. Even the most recent financial crisis has not prompted major demonstrations as it has in Spain, Italy, Greece, and other European crisis countries, where youth unemployment has soared to more than 50%.

When we consider all of this against our key research finding that neither the value attached to work nor workplace commitment has weakened and that age has no significant bearing on either of these factors, there is good reason to ask whether a wage-earning generation of Millennials even exists (see also Zabel, Biermeier-Hanson, Baltes, Early, & Shepard, 2016). An increasing appreciation of leisure, home and family life hardly suffices as a key experience for a generation, either. We maintain that this result is not indicative of conflicts between work, family and leisure, but rather that they are mutually supportive.

Young people who embarked on their careers in the strong labour market of the early 2000s have had more resources for self-realization than older generations did. It is no longer necessary for them to orient to work as a value in itself. Instead, they may consider it more important to identify with the work community, that is, in Goldthorpe et al.'s (1968) terms to adopt a solidarity orientation.

Finland is a relatively affluent European country. Household net assets have increased rapidly since the childhood of the baby boom generation. Even though young people's assets have grown less than those of older people, mainly by virtue of the assets tied to housing property, the younger generations are wealthier than their predecessors. It is clear that this has left its mark on the values and attitudes of young people. The appreciation of leisure and family has increased because people are in the position to invest more in them.

International comparisons have found similar generational differences as those we have described here. These differences are not tied to a certain age group, but comparisons over time suggest that changing values do not swing back as young people get older (Inglehart, 2008). Insofar as young people today attach more value to leisure and family than they do to gainful employment, it is unlikely that this will change with advancing age.

It is an interesting question for further research how the recent financial crisis and the uncertainty it is causing will affect future attitudes to gainful employment. We suspect that the value attached to work will at least not weaken in the immediate future. On the contrary, fears of unemployment may well add to the appreciation of work as young people have more to lose financially than earlier generations.

All in all, young people today have good working conditions and their attitudes to work are conservative rather than radical, despite the problems they are facing in the labour market both in Finland and elsewhere in Europe. In Finland, youth unemployment in the wake of the 1990s recession remained at a higher level than previously, and

short-term contracts increased more rapidly among young people than in the population on average (Helve, 2013; Ranta, 2013).

Although the majority young Finns are content with their future prospects, there are signs of new social divisions that stem from unemployment and social exclusion. In this respect, there is an important pattern of gender differentiation that calls for a more detailed investigation not only in Finland but also in other European countries. An increasing number of young men are left without a job, training or education (OECD, 2016b, pp. 358-359), reflecting the plight caused by the financial crisis and politics of austerity. Nonetheless, it seems that Finland (as well as the other Nordic countries) has been quite successful in preventing the marginalization of young people from the labour market (Eurofound, 2013). The Nordic labour market model has shown that it performs well even under conditions of economic crisis.

The work orientation of the generations studied here shows more signs of permanence and continuity than they do of difference and conflict. Our results do not support the claim, widespread in popular media, that the Millennials and their distinctive characteristics will be forcing work organizations into radical changes. The “generational contract” of

our society, according to which the common denominator in the continuum of generations is reciprocity, does not seem to be in jeopardy.

## Appendix A

### *Items Adopted From the Finnish Quality of Work Life Surveys by Statistics Finland (1984, 1990, 1997, 2003, 2008, and 2013)*

#### 1. Value attached to work, family, and leisure time:

A1. To begin with, I shall list some core aspects of life which are of varying importance to different people. How important are these aspects of life to you personally: Is gainful employment very important, quite important or not very important to you? What about home and family life? And leisure interests?

#### 2. Readiness to change jobs:

F12. If you could change jobs for the same pay, would you change to: The same occupational field; A different occupational field; Or would you not change at all?

## Appendix B

Pairwise Comparison Test Results for the Statistically Significant Interactions (as Presented in Tables 1 and 2) Between Respondents Aged 15-29 and 30-64.

		Mean difference (SE): 15-29 years to 30-64 years	F(df) Sig.
Values			
Gainful employment very important: Age × Education	Basic	-.046 (.019)	6.087(1)*
	Secondary	-.013 (.011)	1.283(1) <i>ns</i>
	Higher	.058 (.022)	6.679(1)**
Gainful employment very important: Age × Year (change over time)	1984	-.033 (.018)	3.274(1) <i>ns</i>
	1990	-.059 (.021)	8.158(1)**
	1997	.028 (.024)	1.299(1) <i>ns</i>
	2003	.021 (.021)	1.047(1) <i>ns</i>
	2008	.021 (.020)	1.054(1) <i>ns</i>
	2013	.019 (.021)	.879(1) <i>ns</i>
Gainful employment very important: Age × Gender	Men	-.030 (.014)	4.360(1)*
	Women	.029 (.013)	4.663(1)*
Family very important: Age × Gender	Men	.013 (.009)	2.445(1) <i>ns</i>
	Women	.059 (.009)	39.764(1)***
Family very important: Age × Year (change over time)	1984	.034 (.012)	8.277(1)**
	1990	.015 (.014)	1.173(1) <i>ns</i>
	1997	.013 (.016)	.648(1) <i>ns</i>
	2003	.059 (.014)	17.504(1)***
	2008	.064 (.014)	21.724(1)***
	2013	.032 (.014)	5.334(1)*
Readiness to change jobs			
In the same/to a different occupational field: Age × Education	Basic	.133 (.019)	50.560(1)***
	Secondary	.048 (.011)	17.244(1)***
	Higher	-.012 (.019)	0.443(1) <i>ns</i>
In the same/to a different occupational field: Age × Gender	Men	.030 (.013)	5.068(1)*
	Women	.082 (.013)	41.140(1)***

(continued)

## Appendix B (continued)

		Mean difference (SE): 15-29 years to 30-64 years	F(df) Sig.
To a different occupational field: Age × Education	Basic	.123 (.016)	56.231(1)***
	Secondary	.035 (.010)	11.622(1)***
	Higher	.003 (.017)	.033 (1) ns
To a different occupational field: Age × Year (change over time)	1984	.068 (.015)	20.005(1)***
	1990	.033 (.018)	3.418(1)ns
	1997	.073 (.021)	12.244(1)***
	2003	.082 (.018)	20.098(1)***
	2008	.030 (.018)	2.925(1)ns
	2013	.024 (.018)	1.695(1)ns
To a different occupational field: Age × Gender	Men	.038 (.012)	10.530(1)***
	Women	.066 (.011)	33.567(1)***

Note. Adjustment: Sidak. Negative mean value difference reflects lower mean value for respondents aged 15-29.

## Appendix C

### Correlation Matrix.

	Spearman's rho																		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. Age	1																		
2. Education	-.086**	1																	
3. Time point	-.116**	.341**	1																
4. Gender	-.026**	.075**	.033**	1															
5. Spouse	-.243**	.074**	.017**	-.018**	1														
6. Children	-.239**	.103**	-.019**	-.001	.354**	1													
7. Employed during studies	.250**	-.024**	-.085**	.042**	-.115**	-.083**	1												
8. Employed 0-2 years	.434**	-.119**	-.060**	.008	-.234**	-.174**	.248**	1											
9. Temporary contract	.232**	.012	.002	.093**	-.112**	-.070**	.149**	.270**	1										
10. Threats	.005	.018**	.116**	-.015*	-.013*	-.001	-.029**	.020**	.250**	1									
11. Has been unemployed	.189**	-.050**	.013*	-.027**	-.080**	-.038**	-.01	.102**	.309**	.277**	1								
12. Poor employability	-.219**	-.137**	-.029**	.100**	.034**	-.119**	-.094**	-.083**	-.077**	.049**	-.037**	1							
13. Monotonous work	.110**	-.153**	-.027**	.001	-.073**	-.039**	.057**	.098**	.011	.063**	.077**	.067**	1						
14. Wage level	-.246**	.311**	-.013*	-.296**	.138**	.124**	-.084**	-.214**	-.201**	-.073**	-.212**	-.072**	-.164**	1					
15. Work values	-.043**	-.035**	-.011	-.063**	-.013*	.008	-.058**	-.058**	-.040**	.01	.007	.012	-.023**	.060**	1				
16. Family values	-.083**	.088**	.143**	.131**	.303**	.221**	-.046**	-.068**	-.017**	.012	-.028**	-.006	-.035**	.008	.109**	1			
17. Leisure time values	.078**	.075**	.164**	-.044**	-.086**	-.140**	.041**	.047**	.025**	-.001	-.006	-.032**	-.001	.016*	.059**	.073**	1		
18. Readiness to change jobs	.051**	.042**	.008	.005	-.021**	.040**	.028**	.024**	.016**	.110**	.039**	-.034**	.147**	.022**	-.058**	-.023**	.009	1	
19. ... in the same field	.021**	.092**	-.004	.041**	.002	.023**	.025**	.004	.067**	.063**	.019**	-.091**	-.044**	.045**	-.013*	-.003	-.015*	.539**	1
20. ... to a different field	.038**	-.037**	.012	-.032**	-.026**	.024**	.009	.023**	-.043**	.066**	.027**	.045**	.206**	-.016*	-.053**	-.023**	.024**	.637**	-.306**

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level, two-tailed. \*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level, two-tailed.

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