ABSTRACT

With the upsurge of older adults still working and later cohorts entering the workforce, intergenerational conflict is becoming a major concern. Research has put much emphasis on the differences between generations without considering the way intergenerational conflict is perceived. According to the dual concern model, conflict strategies can be determined on the basis of motivational orientation: concern for self, concern for others. On the other hand, according to social identity theory, conflict arises when in-group and out-group members engage in comparisons and try to gain advantages over the opposing group. Since both theories consider the self and other dimensions of social identity, they can be integrated to explain intergenerational conflict, with motivational orientation and conflict strategies predicted by social identity. The experimental study employs a 2 (Subgroup identity salience: low VS high young/older group membership) x 2 (Superordinate identity salience: low VS high organizational group membership) factorial design. At the time of writing this abstract, 142 postgraduate students (age: M = 30.70, SD = 7.91; sex: 65% females) are randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. Participants respond to a hypothetical scenario about work conflict. Using ANOVA and planned contrasts, preliminary analysis reveals that the high superordinate identity salience increases integrating (t(64) = 1.89, p < .05), obliging (t(64) = 1.69, p < .05), and compromising strategies (t(64) = 1.73, p < .05) while subgroup identity salience increases dominating strategies (t(64) = 1.99, p < .05), but only when interdependent self construal is low. An opposite pattern is found among the high interdependent individuals. Findings obtained from this study provide practical implications for reducing intergenerational conflict in the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

- Due to the declining fertility and mortality rates, the rapidly raising population of older adults has become a global phenomenon in the recent years. With the upsurge of older adults, the Baby Boomer cohorts working and later cohorts from Generation X and Y entering the workforce, age diversity is becoming a major concern. Age diversity in an organization can lead to complications for managerial staff, particularly intergenerational conflict.

- Intergenerational conflict research has received much attention in the past decade with emphasis on the differences between generations, such as conflict styles, work values, and work ethics. However, while these studies are helpful in identifying differences between older and younger adults, it does not take into consideration of the way intergenerational conflict is perceived and how this cognition process translates into behavior. Furthermore, while a great deal of attention has been paid towards intergenerational conflict in the West, empirical research has been minimized in the West, empirical research has been minimized, particularly in Chinese populations where research is lacking. Research on cultural differences in conflict management consistently suggests that the strategies utilized by Chinese adults differ from their Western counterparts.

- Therefore, it is important to examine whether theoretical approaches developed in the West can be generalized to Chinese populations in explaining the processes involved in intergenerational conflict. In order to address this gap in the literature, this study aims to adopt two major theoretical approaches, dual concern model (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986), to examine the underlying mechanisms of intergenerational conflict among older and younger adults in Hong Kong.

- According to the dual concern model, conflict styles can be determined on the basis of motivational orientation, including concern for self and concern for others. Depending on the different combinations of high and low levels of self and other concern, 5 conflict styles can be predicted, including integrating, obliging, avoiding, compromising, and dominating. However, this theoretical model alone is not sufficient to explain intergenerational conflict as it emphasizes interpersonal rather than intergroup process. Communication between generations not only involves interpersonal relations between two individuals but also intergroup process between older and younger adults.

- A major theoretical approach suitable for explaining the intergroup dynamics in intergenerational conflict is the social identity theory. Social identity is conceptualized as one’s membership in certain subordinate and superordinate social groups that have emotional and value significance attached to them. Individuals who identify themselves as a member of a group are expected to seek a positive distinctiveness of the in-group compared to the out-group. Applying to intergenerational conflict, the theory predicts that workers who are similar in ages would categorize themselves as members of the in-group while other workers who are dissimilar ages as members of the out-group. Conflict arises when in-group and out-group members engage in comparisons and try to gain advantages over the opposing group. Since the social identity theory also considers the self and other relationship, it is hypothesized that it can be integrated with the dual concern model when examining intergenerational conflict, with motivational orientation and conflict styles predicted by social identity.

CONCLUSION

- The integrated model of conflict is partially supported among the low interdependent individuals.

- The integrated model of conflict is not supported among the high interdependent individuals.

- Consistent with previous literature on interdependent self construal which suggests that individuals high on this construct prefer to maintain harmony, deter from conflicts, and use accommodating strategies rather than assertive strategies.