



## **Using the P-O Fit Theory to Examine Work Attitudes of Employees in Shanghai, China**

**Wang Zhe<sup>1\*</sup>, Geetha Subramaniam<sup>2</sup>, M Selvam<sup>3</sup>**

*\* Corresponding Author*

<sup>1</sup> Graduate School of Business, SEGi University, Kota Damansara, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia,

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Education, Language and Psychology, SEGi University, Kota Damansara, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia,

<sup>3</sup> Dept of Commerce and Financial Studies, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India.

wangzhe7648@163.com, geethasubramaniam@segi.edu.my, drmselvam@yahoo.co.in  
Tel: +0086-15821211616

### **Abstract**

In light of the adverse work attitudes represented by "Tang Ping" and "Nei Juan", this study explores the determinants influencing Chinese employees' work attitudes. By employing purposive sampling, 479 valid questionnaires were obtained from employees within the Shanghai service sector. The investigation encompasses an examination of the relationship between gender, age, marital status, working years, and work attitudes. Additionally, the study employs the Person-Organisation Fit theory to explore the influence of generational differences, personality traits, and organisational culture on work attitudes. Findings suggest that all three factors, along with some selected demographic variables, significantly impact Chinese work attitudes.

Keywords: Quality of Life, SDG, Well-being, Work Attitude.

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Two lifestyle movements which first appeared in Chinese social media under the buzzword "Involution (Nei Juan)" and "Lying flat (Tang Ping)" have rapidly triggered a wide range of heated discussions. These phenomena serve as reflections of the substantial work pressure experienced by contemporary employees and the intense competition prevailing in the employment market (Mulvey & Wright, 2022). According to Lu (2008), Chinese work attitudes are mainly influenced by Confucian virtues, especially the work ethics of diligence, collectivism, and personal social networks that dominate the dynamic behaviours of Chinese employees. This collective cognition reinforces the inherent idea that it is necessary to dedicate oneself and be responsible for the organisation without justification. Although traditional work attitudes have significantly shaped modern ones, individual judgment and diverse opportunities for career paths in the Chinese economy have extremely influenced their current work-related attitudes (Yi et al., 2010; Li, 2021).

#### **1.1 Problem of the Study**

The brutal work culture of the "996" overtime schedule, requiring Chinese employees to work from 9 am to 9 pm for at least six days a week, has significantly disrupted their well-being and work-life balance. Nearly half the workforce faces challenges such as longer working hours, increased housing prices, and late retirement age in major Chinese cities, especially Beijing and Shanghai (Li et al., 2023; Su, 2023). Research by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 2021 shows

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that working for 55 hours or more per week increases the risk of stroke by 35% and the likelihood of heart disease by 17%, compared to working 35-40 hours per week. It is worth noting that similar discussions have also gained attention in the United States. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the "quiet quitting" conversation has gained popularity, advocating that workers should not undertake tasks beyond their job descriptions and resist the "hustle culture," which promotes prolonged working hours and unrecognised tasks (Forrester, 2023). These issues highlight the need to examine whether organisational culture aligns with the values of employees and how generational differences, personality traits, and organisational culture influence employees' work attitudes.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The first objective: To examine whether gender, age, marital status and working years have a relationship with work attitudes.  
 The second objective: Using the Person-Organisation fit (P-O fit) theory to examine the relationship between generational differences, personality traits, organisational culture and work attitudes.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 P-O Fit Theory

P-O fit research aims to examine the practice of hiring individuals who are a better fit for a specific company rather than solely meeting the KSA (Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities) qualification standards. Chatman (1989) argued that the interactional model identifies the similarities and differences between individual and organisational characteristics through the value congruence process (Figure 1). P-O fit process is a mutual selection process, and the outcome is the compatibility of organisational culture between individuals and organisations (Goetz & Wald, 2021). Although the P-O fit concept is relevant to the intention of leaving, work attitudes, and work performance, the content domain and measurement instruments are still under discussion. In a meta-analysis by Kristof (1996), two key constructs were recommended within the field of P-O fit theory. The first construct pertains to value congruence, which serves as an operation of the P-O fit theory. This construct suggests that when an individual's values align with the values of an organisation, they are more likely to experience a sense of fit and a greater likelihood of success in their professional career path. The second construct highlights the strong correlation between the P-O fit theory and employees' job satisfaction, their propensity to remain with or quit the organisation, and the level of organisational commitment.

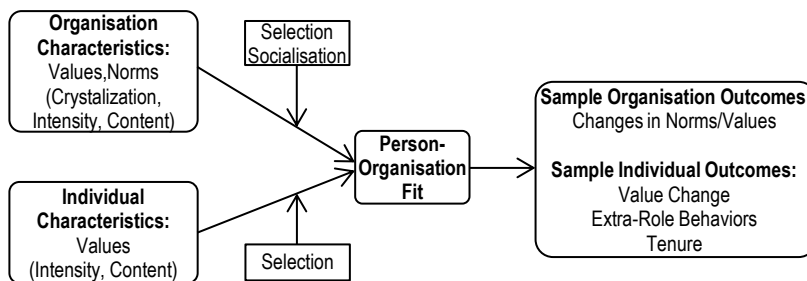


Figure 1: P-O fit interactional model (Source: Chatman, 1989)

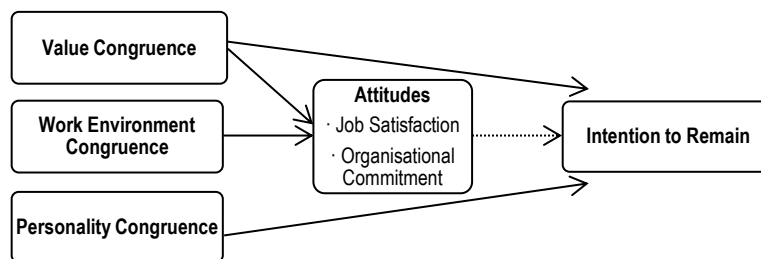


Figure 2: An integrative model of P-O fit theory (Source: Westerman and Cyr, 2004)

Westerman and Cyr (2004) examined two approaches regarding supplementary fit, and needs-supplies fit to determine whether P-O fit impacts employee satisfaction, organisational commitment, and turnover intention (Figure 2). Supplementary fit is typically measured by value and personality congruence to estimate the similarity between individual characteristics and organisational culture. To date, the concept of P-O fit has found extensive application across various research domains, encompassing job attitudes, knowledge management, job performance, and organisation design. Furthermore, Shen et al. (2016) corroborated these findings by demonstrating

that when individuals are well-matched with the community environment, their knowledge contribution is notably enhanced. In this study, the P-O fit theory examines the relationship between individual characteristics and perceived organisational culture.

## 2.2 Work Attitudes

Work attitudes refer to the perceived qualities people feel at work, reflecting the working equilibrium between needs and satisfaction. The differences in work priorities and attitudes may account for the variation in employees' job satisfaction and organisational commitment (George & Jones, 1997). Due to the causality relationship between thinking and subsequent experiencing outcomes, several researchers propose that work attitudes are highly correlated with job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Lambert et al., 2020). Job satisfaction describes the overall sense of employees working at the workplace. Satisfaction or discontent is frequently observed in assessing an individual's work performance and professional background (Hilton et al., 2023). Individuals who feel accomplished at work are more willing to do this work and are more committed to the company. Organisational commitment is the belief and willingness of employees to identify with and remain dedicated to the organisation. High organisational commitment is associated with many positive outcomes for employees and organisations (Lambert et al., 2020).

## 2.3 Generational Differences in Work Attitudes

Many researchers believe individuals share the same historical events and circumstances and consequently have similar preferences towards work (Mannheim, 1952). While others contend that different generations commonly exhibit different levels of commitment, obligation, and responsibility. i.e., millennials show a higher voluntary turnover behaviour than older generations yet lower leaving intentions (Twenge, 2010). Cherrington and England (1979) try to understand the meaning of an individual associated with his/her work ethic, using three primary scales to measure the generational differences in work attitudes:

1. *Desirability of Work Outcomes*: the work outcomes individuals expect at work. This category includes attitudes toward earnings, upward striving, and organisation man ethics.
2. *Pride in Craftsmanship*: individuals' satisfaction and fulfilment in their work.
3. *Moral Importance of Work*: an individual's responsibility to engage in productive activities instead of relying on others for support.

Therefore, the first hypothesis to be tested is:

H1: There is a positive relationship between generational differences and work attitudes.

## 2.4 Personality Traits in Work Attitudes

Personality traits refer to the summarisation of individual differences in interacting with others. Generally, a unique character is relevant to the physiological process while having little relationship with the shared environmental component. Researchers have agreed on extensively using the Big Five personality (BFP) model to represent the most salient individual characteristic. According to Goldberg (1993), the BFP model postulates that individual personality comprises five significant traits, namely Openness (O), Conscientiousness (C), Extraversion (E), Agreeableness (A), and Neuroticism (N). Despite the broad definition, personality traits can affect the evaluative process of work attitudes. Individuals with higher extraversion scores are more optimistic and likely to perform better. Similarly, agreeable employees can be trustful, cooperative, and tolerant. They typically tend to be forgiving and mild in their work evaluations. Therefore, the second hypothesis to be tested is:

H2: There is a positive relationship between personality traits and work attitudes.

## 2.5 Organisational Culture in Work Attitudes

Organisational culture has been recognised as a significant component of a company and maintains a smooth daily business running (Kristof, 1996; Thangal & Sham, 2023). Culture helps organisations identify "fit" employees and provide guidelines and norms for staff to cultivate organisational culture. According to the survey conducted by Glassdoor (2019), 75 per cent of adults would carefully uncover the workplace culture before joining the company. The widely used culture taxonomy-competing values framework (CVF) put forward by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983) interprets the contradictory values underlying different organisational effectiveness models. There are four types of organisational culture, namely a group (clan) culture, a development (adhocracy) culture, a hierarchical (bureaucratic) culture and a rational (market) culture (Figure 3).

Therefore, the third hypothesis to be tested is:

H3: There is a positive relationship between organisational culture and work attitudes.

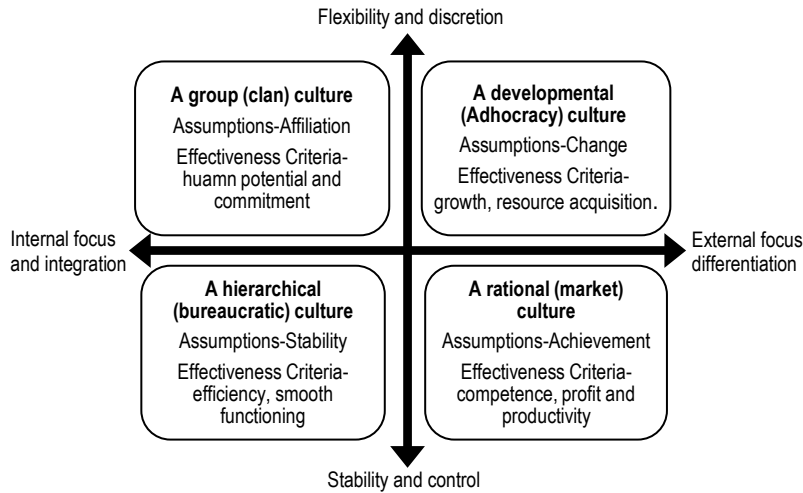


Figure 3: Competing values framework  
(Source: Quinn & McGrath, 1985; Cameron & Quinn, 1999)

By using a quantitative approach, this study explores the influence of generational differences, personality traits, and organisational culture on employees' work attitudes, as illustrated in Figure 4.

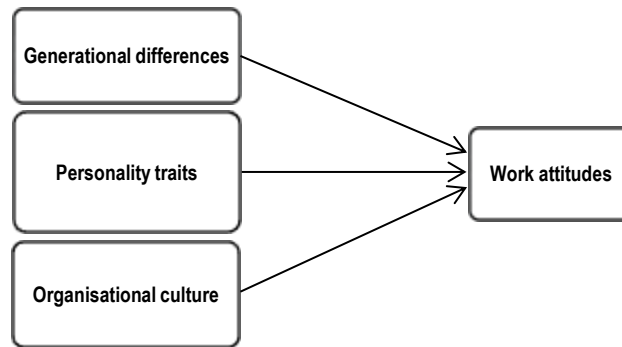


Figure 4: Proposed conceptual framework

### 3.0 Methodology

All measurement instruments used in this study were drawn from existing literature (Table 1). The moral importance of work was assessed using Blood's (1969) Pro-Protestant Ethics (PPE) scale, while the dimension of pride in craftsmanship was sourced from Wollack et al. (1971) in the form of the Survey of Work Values (SWV). The desirability of work outcomes dimension was introduced by Cherrington and England (1979). The Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) developed by Gosling (2003) was employed in this study, as Gosling argued that single-item measures could yield reliable results without placing an excessive burden on participants, consistent with the findings of Burisch (1997). For assessing organisational culture, an 11-item questionnaire sourced from Shortell et al. (1995) was utilised. Work attitudes were measured using the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) by Hackman and Oldham (1974). The Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) was developed by Mowday et al. (1979). A 5-point Likert scale was used (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

A set of self-administered questionnaires was distributed through the online platform Wen Juan Xing to employees in the service sectors of Shanghai. Three filter questions ensured that the target group consisted of legal working-age individuals currently employed. Out of the 800 distributed questionnaires, 321 were deemed invalid due to incomplete responses, technical issues, or not meeting the inclusion criteria. The final usable sample comprised 479 questionnaires, resulting in an approximate response rate of 60%. The study employed IBM SPSS Statistics 26 to examine the correlation between four demographic factors and employees' work attitudes. Subsequently, Smart-PLS software version 4.0.9.2 was used to test the three hypotheses.

Table 1: Variables and measurement instruments

Constructs	Number of Items	Item Source	Cronbach Alpha (Previous literature)
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<b>Generational Differences</b>	14 items (a) Desirability of Work Outcomes (b) Pride in Craftsmanship (c) Moral Importance of Work	Blood (1969), Cherrington & England (1979), Wollack et al. (1971)	0.61-0.79
<b>Personality Traits</b>	10 items (a) Openness to Experience (b) Conscientiousness (c) Extraversion (d) Agreeableness (e) Emotional stability	Gosling (2003)	0.72
<b>Organisational Culture</b>	11 items (a) Consensual (b) Rational (c) Developmental (d) Hierarchical	Shortell et al. (1995)	0.77-0.84
<b>Work Attitudes</b>	10 items (a) Organisational Commitment (b) Job Satisfaction	Hackman & Oldham (1974), Mowday et al. (1979)	0.76-0.82

## 4.0 Findings

### 4.1 Demographic statistics

Table 2 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. The respondents are evenly divided in terms of gender, with males accounting for 51%. Generational representation in terms of age shows that a majority (43%) are Generation Y, followed by Generation Z (37%) and Generation X (20%). Concerning marital status, the majority are single (56%), and the largest proportion of respondents (34%) have less than one year of work experience. Many individuals have worked for 1 to 2 years (27%), while only 14% have five or more years of work experience.

Table 2: Respondents' Demographic Profile (N=479)

No	Demographic variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	247	52
		Female	232	48
2	Age (in years)	16-26	177	37
		27-42	204	43
		43-55	98	20
3	Marital status	Single	269	56
		Married	209	44
4	Working years	Less than 1 year	162	34
		1 to 2 years	128	27
		3 to 4 years	121	25
		5 years or longer	68	14

### 4.2 Correlation between Demographic Variables and Work Attitudes

The demographic factors of gender and marital status were analyzed through Independent T-test (Table 3), while others with more than two categories were interpreted through one-way ANOVA analysis (Table 4). Results show that age, marital status, and working years have a significant relationship with work attitudes.

Table 3: Correlations between Gender, Marital Status and Work Attitudes

No	Demographic variables	Category	Mean (SD)	Mean diff (95% CI)	t-stats (df)	P value
1	Gender	Male	29.52 (7.902)	.477(-.868, 1.822)	.697 (475.839)	.486
		Female	29.12 (7.083)			
2	Marital status	Single	29.96 (7.626)	1.437(.079, 2.794)	2.080 (476)	.038**
		Married	28.53 (7.310)			

Table 4: Correlations between Age, Working Years and Work Attitudes

No	Demographic variables	Category	Mean (SD)	F-stats (df) (P-value)
3	Age (in years)	16-26	30.41 (7.685)	4.322 (.014) **
		27-42	29.18 (7.417)	
		43-55	27.67 (7.116)	
4	Working years	Less than 1 year	28.49 (7.661)	2.769 (.041) **
		1 to 2 years	28.59 (6.775)	
		3 to 4 years	30.57 (7.708)	
		5 years or longer	30.50 (7.808)	

### 4.3 Evaluation of measurement model

The multivariate skewness and kurtosis were examined in the current study. The findings indicate that the data under investigation does not adhere to a multivariate normal distribution, as evidenced by the significant values obtained for Mardia's multivariate skewness ( $\beta=3.2, p<0.01$ ) and multivariate kurtosis ( $\beta=32.446, p<0.01$ ). Given this departure from normality, using Smart PLS was deemed suitable for analyzing the data. Furthermore, an assessment was conducted to address potential common method bias (CMB) due to the concurrent measurement of both exogenous and endogenous variables in the study (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The results presented in Table 5 demonstrate that the study's variance inflation factor (VIF) values were below the threshold of 3.3, indicating the absence of any significant issues pertaining to CMB.

Table 5: Full Collinearity Result

Generational Differences	Organisational Culture	Personality Traits	Work Attitudes
1.541	1.387	1.565	2.438

In accordance with the guidelines provided by Hair et al. (2019), the measurement model was subjected to an evaluation of overall loading, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). Convergent validity was examined to ascertain the ability of multiple items to measure the intended construct effectively. The recommended thresholds for loading and AVE were 0.5, while for CR, it was 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019). As presented in Table 6, the results revealed that all the obtained values exceeded the specified threshold, thus affirming the presence of convergent validity within the study.

Table 6: Measurement Model and Convergent Validity

Group	Item	Loading (Overall)	CR	AVE
Generational Difference	GD1	0.725	0.940	0.527
	GD2	0.729		
	GD3	0.727		
	GD4	0.755		
	GD5	0.719		
	GD6	0.705		
	GD7	0.729		
	GD8	0.720		
	GD9	0.705		
	GD10	0.720		
	GD11	0.735		
	GD12	0.742		
	GD13	0.691		
	GD14	0.762		
Personality Traits	PT1	0.749	0.923	0.520
	PT2	0.742		
	PT3	0.712		
	PT4	0.736		
	PT5	0.721		
	PT6	0.725		
	PT7	0.733		
	PT8	0.754		
	PT9	0.737		
	PT10	0.724		
Organisational Culture	OC1	0.720	0.921	0.538
	OC2	0.729		
	OC3	0.728		
	OC4	0.725		
	OC5	0.719		
	OC6	0.686		
	OC7	0.696		
	OC8	0.742		
	OC9	0.765		
	OC10	0.733		
	OC11	0.689		
Work Attitudes	WA1	0.798	0.945	0.634
	WA2	0.794		
	WA3	0.820		
	WA4	0.811		
	WA5	0.787		
	WA6	0.768		
	WA7	0.778		
	WA8	0.813		
	WA9	0.783		
	WA10	0.810		

To ascertain discriminant validity, the assessment of the hetero-trait mono-trait (HTMT) ratio was conducted. Values below 0.9 are indicative of discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019). Table 7 provides an overview of the HTMT values of all constructs examined in the

study. Notably, all recorded values were below 0.9, thereby confirming the establishment of discriminant validity across the four constructs investigated. With convergent and discriminant validity both satisfactorily established, the measurement items employed in the study were deemed valid and reliable. Thus, the study proceeded to the structural model.

Table 7: Discriminant Validity (HTMT ratio)

	Generational Differences	Organisational Culture	Personality Traits	Work Attitudes
<b>Generational Differences</b>				
<b>Organisational Culture</b>	0.089			
<b>Personality Traits</b>	0.073	0.090		
<b>Work Attitudes</b>	0.458	0.415	0.527	

#### 4.4 Hypothesis Testing

Hahn and Ang (2017) advocate for the consideration of multiple criteria, including effect sizes and confidence intervals, in addition to p-values, for a comprehensive assessment. In the current study, Table 8 presents three hypotheses relating to work attitudes. The R2 value, which stands at 0.590, indicates that the three variables accounted for 59% of the variance in work attitudes. Notably, all three hypotheses garnered support. Generational differences ( $\beta=0.469$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), personality traits ( $\beta=0.480$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and organisational culture ( $\beta=0.395$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) were found to be statistically significant predictors. Moreover, the effect sizes for all three variables exceeded the threshold of 0.35, denoting an extensive effect capability (Cohen, 1988).

Table 8: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta	SE	T-value	P values	LL	UL	f2	R2	VIF	Decision
H1	Generational Differences -> Work Attitudes	0.469	0.029	15.968	0.001	0.418	0.515	0.534		1.005	Supported
H2	Personality Traits -> Work Attitudes	0.480	0.028	17.137	0.000	0.432	0.525	0.561	0.590	1.003	Supported
H3	Organisational Culture -> Work Attitudes	0.395	0.031	12.884	0.004	0.342	0.444	0.377		1.007	Supported

## 5.0 Discussion

The investigation of work attitudes was enriched by applying the P-O fit theory, which shed light on various aspects of the phenomenon. From an individual perspective, alterations in values and personality traits emerged as potential drivers for work attitude changes. On the organisational front, the P-O fit process was primarily influenced by factors such as organisational culture and the work environment. The proposed framework provided valuable insights into the underlying reasons for the changes observed in Chinese work attitudes.

The findings of the first objective show that young employees, who are relatively new to the workforce, tend to hold higher expectations for salary and promotions due to their limited work experience and their desire to develop and master skills. Consequently, they are strongly inclined to work diligently and maintain a positive work attitude (Gaidhani et al., 2019). When comparing single employees to their married counterparts, it becomes evident that single individuals encounter fewer obstacles in achieving a balance between their work obligations and familial responsibilities. Single employees possess the advantage of being able to dedicate a greater amount of time and concentration to their job duties. The third significant demographic variable, working years, can be explained by the facilitation of career advancement and professional growth. As individuals advance in their professional trajectories, they often encounter opportunities to assume more demanding and fulfilling positions. This upward progression can engender heightened engagement, motivation, and satisfaction in their work, thereby fostering more positive work attitudes (Semwal & Dhyani, 2017).

In support of Hypothesis 1, the present study demonstrates a positive influence of generational differences on work attitudes. These findings align with existing literature and reflect the concerted efforts of researchers to understand the workplace changes experienced by Generation Z. In light of emerging economic shifts, employees exhibit distinct work attitudes compared to earlier generations (Nguyen Ngoc et al., 2022). Furthermore, Hypothesis 2 shows the positive impact of personality traits on work attitudes. The study's findings show the importance of employee's personality traits, as individuals need to identify their preferences and effectively leverage their innate characteristics to enhance their work experiences (Obrenovic, 2022). In addition, Hypothesis 3 reveals a positive relationship between organisational culture and work attitudes. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of organisational culture is vital for managers to navigate change and cultivate a positive work environment successfully. Overall, this research contributes to our understanding of work attitudes by considering individual and organisational factors, paving the way for effective management strategies and establishing conducive work environments.

## 6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

The study found that the demographic variables of age (in years), marital status and working years have a significant relationship with work attitudes. At the same time, there was a positive relationship between generational differences, personality traits, organisational culture and work attitudes (Tse, 2022; Mohsen et al., 2020). In the practical aspect, instead of suppressing the negative work attitudes generated by young Chinese to maintain the stability of current working conditions, local governments must strengthen cultural management and restrict serious overtime issues properly. The new attitudes induced by social and cultural changes result in growing scepticism about outdated regulations. Hence, the investigation of the work attitudes of the labour force will provide rational guidance for policymakers to alleviate the work pressure on the workforce and create a relatively harmonious cultural environment. From the theoretical aspect, the study provides an outlook on the evolved definition of current Chinese work attitudes and values.

Two limitations were observed; firstly, this study only focused on employees in the services sector. Secondly, a major city in China was identified. Future studies should extend the scope to other cities and compare the differences in work attitudes in other sectors. Comparisons also should be made between employees in the rural and urban sectors to get a better understanding of generational employees' work attitudes.

## Acknowledgement

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper re-establishes the use of the P-O fit theory as a theory to examine work attitudes among generational employees. It thus contributes to the body of knowledge on work attitudes. It further suggests ways to improve the work environment and the quality of life of employees, which is in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - 3, which is well-being and productivity at the workplace.

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