Analysis of the Demand Characteristics of Offline Rights of Employees from Different Generations and the Differentiated Management Strategies

Ruohan Tang *

College of Economics, Tianjin University of Science and Technology. Tianjin, China

* Corresponding Author Email: outlook_479BD0FBE1A024B@outlook.com

Abstract. Under the influence of digital technology and remote working, the boundary between "work" and "life" is constantly weakening. The "offline right" of employees, that is, the right not to be required or forced to participate in work activities outside working hours, is receiving increasing attention from both organizational management and employees' own health aspects. This article examines the heterogeneous characteristics of employees' offline right demand behavior from a generational perspective and explores the impact of generational differences on employees' offline right demands. At the same time, it proposes differentiated treatment measures. This article will be discussed from the perspective of "generational differences-generational demand differences-generational management methods", aiming to provide a reference for enterprises to formulate effective human resource management systems. In the context of digitalization, it aims to build a reasonable and efficient dialogue mechanism and a guarantee system for the differentiated demands of offline rights between enterprises and employees of different generations.

Keywords: Different generations; Offline right; Differentiated management.

1. Introduction

With the development of the digital age and the widespread application of digital tools, workers have the possibility to work remotely through digital technology. Online working makes the working hours of workers more flexible and variable, and even employers require workers to reply to group messages and handle work affairs during their rest time, which poses a great challenge to workers' rest rights [1]. Because the traditional rest rights system cannot effectively respond to informal working hours carried out outside the workplace, the boundaries between work and rest times have become more blurred, and the "offline right" (Right to Disconnect) thus emerged: that is, workers have the right to not engage in work-related behaviors through digital tools during non-working hours [2]. The offline right is essentially a human right rather than a new labor right [3].

With the development of information technology, the employment methods of employers towards workers have also undergone significant changes. In the network era, employers can assign work tasks to workers through instant messaging software anytime and anywhere, and workers can also provide work feedback anytime and anywhere through mobile phones, computers, and other terminal devices. The working hours and lifetime of workers have become less distinguishable, and the boundaries between working time and rest time have disappeared. German scholars have called this phenomenon the disappearance of "work boundaries", and the continuous expansion of this phenomenon is likely to infringe upon employees' rest rights and the tranquility of their private lives, hurting their physical and mental health. The remaining rights of Chinese workers are not yet well protected, and the development of digital and information communication technology has dissolved the boundaries between working time and rest time, catalyzing the emergence of the offline right. The introduction of this right helps improve employees' quality of life, increase their work efficiency, and job satisfaction [4]. Research shows that employees who can completely disconnect from work during their free time exhibit higher work performance and stronger loyalty to the company [5]. The connection between digital technology and different generations of employees also determines their different demands for offline rights.

Based on "Research on Youth: Evolution from 'Generation' to 'Post-Generation'" [6], this article divides current workplace employees into the following four generations: the Baby Boomer generation (born from 1946 to 1964), the X generation (born from 1965 to 1980), the Y generation/Millennials (born from 1981 to 1996), and the Z generation (born from 1997 to 2012). Each generation is located in different political institutional environments, economic development stages and technical conditions, thus forming differentiated work value orientations and rights consciousness. The analysis in this article will be based on the above generational division to study generational differences, the needs of different generations and the strategies that enterprises can adopt to manage this phenomenon.

2. Differences in the Demand for the Offline Right Among Different Generations of Employees in Various Dimensions

The Baby Boomer generation grew up in a social environment with a stronger collectivist color, emphasizing stability and organizational identity, and preferring formal and standardized communication methods. The X generation experienced the gradual establishment of the market economy system, emphasizing responsibility, efficiency and contractual spirit, and had a cautious attitude towards the adoption of digital tools. The Y generation entered society with the popularization of the Internet, having a high level of technology acceptance, valuing career development opportunities as well as rule fairness and boundary control. The Z generation, as "digital natives", grew up in a highly informationized environment, with significantly enhanced self-awareness and rights consciousness, and are more prone to digital burnout and psychological stress.

2.1. Cognitive Dimension

The Baby Boomer generation and the X generation experienced the working systems of the industrialization period, and in terms of work attitude, they have many characteristics of "responsible" and "disappearance of work boundaries". They are more likely to consider the offline right as a recognition of personal living space and the maintenance of professional dedication. They believe that offline rights are not a rigid rule but rather an autonomous decision made by individuals to engage in online work based on the completion of tasks. If there are no emergencies at present, offline work can be carried out. Offline time is a form of respect for one's own rest time; however, when facing important work and urgent situations at the workplace, sacrificing personal time to work overtime is a manifestation of a sense of work responsibility.

The era background of the Y and Z generations is a highly information-advanced society. They are confronted with information overload, information anxiety, and confusion regarding the boundaries between work and personal life. Therefore, their understanding of offline rights is more from the perspective of mental health, considering offline rights as an important basic human right and one of equal status to salary benefits and promotion opportunities, aiming to resist the pressure of "always on call". It refers to disconnecting from work information harassment to restore physical and mental health and regain a sense of self-worth. They have a more absolute understanding of offline rights, meaning that during non-working hours, which belong to the private space of personal life, should be completely separated from work. This is an important condition for ensuring individual mental health.

2.2. Emotional Dimension

The baby boomers and X generation, after a long period of socialization, have become accustomed to the mindset of prioritizing work. Their psychological state when receiving work information during non-working hours is relatively stable. They usually weigh and judge whether to respond to work messages received after work if they are important. Unimportant messages are not rushed to respond, and they rarely experience anxiety or resistance. Some older professionals even regard "always on

call" as a way to gain leadership recognition and realize self-worth. They adopt a tolerant attitude towards the acceptance of work information.

Y and Z generations, however, are more sensitive to work information during non-working hours and have more significant negative emotions. In their value ranking, quality of life and self-experience occupy an important position. Receiving work information during non-working hours is regarded as an invasion of their private domain, thus generating a series of negative emotions such as anxiety, irritability, and rejection. When repeatedly receiving work messages during rest time, young people are prone to having a sense of work resistance, and they tend to regard this unreasonable working method as an important indicator of whether the company is humanized. They may even give up some companies during job hunting because of this.

2.3. Behavioral Dimension

In terms of offline action preferences in reality, the older generations (baby boomers and X generation) have more "passive" and "flexible" offline actions. They do not tend to actively establish clear offline boundaries, such as turning off work software notification alerts, blocking work groups, etc. Instead, they will judge whether to respond based on the urgency and importance of the information. This is based on their consideration of workplace interpersonal relationships and work responsibilities. They do not cause unnecessary misunderstandings due to excessive offline time.

Young people (Y and Z generations) have a more "active" and "comprehensive" choice of offline behavior. They tend to define the boundaries of work through direct behavioral settings, such as actively closing work email and office software after work, setting automatic replies to indicate that they are offline, and refusing to attend work meetings during non-working hours, etc. They are more inclined to use institutional means to guarantee their offline rights, such as guiding enterprises to introduce "offline rights" regulations, specifying how to handle work-related information during non-working hours, etc.

2.4. Comparison and Analysis

By comparison, each generation of employees has given different meanings and reflections to offline rights. For the baby boomers and X generation employees, their offline rights are a symbol of status and respect, and they have an elastic characteristic based on context. Their perception of offline rights is weakened, and they have no awareness of it. For the employees of Generation Y, it is contractual compensation with clear result-oriented boundaries, and they have a vague concept of offline rights but low demand; while for the employees of Generation Z, offline rights are an inviolable legal right and a necessary health item. The new generation of 90s employees show an attitude of being pioneers in defending their own rights. This is not a coincidence, but a result projected onto different generations by social development, technological progress, economic development and changes in cultural concepts.

The baby boomers lived in an era of collectivism and gradually abundant material resources. After experiencing the end of the planned economy and the early stage of reform and opening up, in the workplace, dedication, obedience and seniority were highly valued, and going to work was the most important way of collective belonging and social identity acquisition apart from making a living. Therefore, the cognition of "whether to be offline" was a kind of "privilege" or "trust" from the organization, representing seniority and status. "Work flexibility" means that one can change one's schedule at any time according to the overall situation and personal interests. Generation X grew up in an era of the establishment of the market economy, intense competition and an increasingly standardized social order. They experienced the promulgation of the Labor Contract Law and the introduction of the management system of foreign enterprises. They believe in "more work, more pay, and the spirit of contract". Their growth was accompanied by market pressure, such as housing and education, so they were very concerned about whether the exchange and return of work was fair and reasonable. They could accept hard work, but they needed clear rules and corresponding compensation. The demand for "contractual compensation" thus emerged. Generation Y and

Generation Z lived in a time of strong national power, abundant material resources and awakening self-awareness. They were the core of China's family planning policy, and the environment of their growth placed more emphasis on self-experience and development. The mainstream discourse changed from "sacrifice and dedication" to "personal happiness" and "rights consciousness". Therefore, they regard the right to rest and health as inherent and non-negotiable personal rights, rather than an organization's favor. The post-00s generation even pushed this right consciousness to the extreme, becoming the default assumption.

The essence of this phenomenon is that in the grand transformation from an industrial society to a digital society, from a collectivist orientation to an individual orientation, from lifelong employment to flexible employment, each generation is shaped by the era with different work concepts and life philosophies. "Offline rights as a new right for workers have significant meaning and value in protecting the legitimate rights and interests of workers, maintaining physical and mental health, and balancing the work and life of workers. " [7] Therefore, to implement the effective implementation of offline rights, reasonable management strategies should be formulated based on the needs of different generations of employees.

3. Differentiated Management Strategies for Different Needs

The existing rest right system is difficult to respond to the reality of invisible overtime in the digital era and cannot play the unique function of offline rights. It urgently needs to establish corresponding systems to protect the rights and interests of workers [8]. Based on the above analysis, when enterprises promote the construction of an offline rights system， they should avoid the "one-size-fits-all" management approach and implement differentiated management strategies according to the characteristics of the needs of different generations of employees.

3.1. Organizational Culture Level

Oppose the culture of "being present means being present" and avoid implicitly requiring employees to respond to information even when they are not physically present. Encourage an open boundary culture: from internal communication and setting examples， allow different choices for different age groups. Hold workshops for different age groups to listen to their views on "the right to be offline" and enhance mutual understanding. For example, young people may need more boundaries, while older employees may be more suitable for flexible boundaries. Regular anonymous surveys of each age group on satisfaction with work pressure and online level.

3.2. System Design Level

Flexible and specific offline guidelines, stipulating when to contact others, when not to contact others, and how to handle special situations, providing different policy options for employees to freely choose. Under the overall principle, a certain degree of customization is achieved, relevant resources and support are provided, and education and welfare applications (such as setting automatic replies and delayed emails), as well as work-sharing platforms, are encouraged and offered to employees. Offline resistance is reduced. Key collaboration time points are set, and beyond these points, employees can work offline freely. "Results-oriented" Generation X and Millennials, "task-oriented" rather than "hour-oriented". Support for workers to mark an "offline identifier" on internal communication software (such as "I'm in deep work" or "I'm not in the office") and sharing preferences among teams. Distribute "offline rights manuals" to new hires (especially Generation Z), explaining what is urgent and how to respond. "Industry self-regulation should be exerted, and industry organizations should be encouraged to set time standards based on their characteristics to avoid one-size-fits-all regulations and solve the disguised overtime problems in different fields and effectively regulate and guide enterprises' online overtime behavior" [9].

3.3. Leadership Communication and Team Management Level

Strengthen the intergenerational leadership of managers, and train managers to recognize and respect the differences in the needs of different generations. For employees who value independence, they are allowed to work offline freely when the goals are clear; for new employees who have just joined the company or employees who prefer guidance-oriented work, more feedback information is provided to reduce anxiety caused by ambiguity. Seek internal consensus, and through team meetings discuss the "small contracts" on the timing and methods of communication with differences within the team. Implement differentiated rewards and recognition for behaviors that effectively maintain group balance and improve work performance. The middle-level leaders in the training discover the generational differences in needs and prevent "one-size-fits-all" practices, and how to motivate different generations of employees based on results-oriented rather than "visibility" deviations [10].

3.4. The Principle of Individual Differences

For Generation Z employees, a management model oriented towards rights protection and mental health should be constructed. By clearly defining the standards for urgent matters, supporting "offline identifiers" and digital disconnection mechanisms, psychological anxiety caused by ambiguous boundaries is reduced, and the transformation from "always responsive" to "deep work" is promoted at the organizational culture level; for Generation Y employees, the focus should be on result orientation and contract compensation mechanisms. By setting core collaboration time periods and incorporating additional non-work-time investments into the performance evaluation or compensatory leave system, their recognition of institutional fairness is enhanced, and they are encouraged to maintain efficient investment within the controllable boundaries. For Generation X employees, a management approach combining flexible boundaries and respect for empowerment should be implemented. By granting them autonomous decision-making space in project progress and response methods, combined with intergenerational leadership training, avoid the weakening of their work enthusiasm due to rigid regulations; for the baby boom generation employees, it is necessary to provide necessary technical support and formalized communication arrangements to reduce the operational pressure brought by the digital office and minimize fragmented information interference during non-working hours.

4. Conclusion

This study found that different generations of employees born in different periods have different demands for offline rights and pointed out that the current "one-size-fits-all" approach is difficult to meet the needs of each generation of employees. It proposed that differentiated and humanized offline rights management methods are necessary and feasible. The differentiated approach can be managed according to the characteristics of the needs of different generations of employees. In terms of management systems, employees of each generation should be distinguished, and corresponding management methods should be formulated to meet their needs for offline rights. The humanized management approach is based on the "people-oriented" management perspective, combining offline rights management with employees' mental health and career development. It ensures the employees' own rights while maintaining the organizational efficiency of the enterprise and provides specific and feasible management suggestions for enterprise managers and HR departments.

This research focuses on the analysis of the differences in offline rights demands among different generations of employees and provides theoretical references and practical guidance for enterprise offline rights management. However, there are still certain research limitations. Future research can be further explored in the following directions:

Firstly, long-term tracking research on the implementation effect of offline rights. Future research can select different types of enterprises as samples, conduct longitudinal tracking surveys for 1-3 years, and focus on analyzing the long-term impact of differentiated offline rights management

systems on core indicators such as employees' mental health, work performance, and organizational commitment.

Secondly, research on new challenges and response strategies of artificial intelligence technology in offline rights management. With the widespread application of artificial intelligence, big data, etc. in enterprise management, future research can deeply analyze the interaction mechanism between artificial intelligence technology and offline rights management, and explore new paradigms of offline rights management under the empowerment of technology; at the same time, focusing on ethical issues in the application process of technology, propose balanced strategies that take into account both technological efficiency and employees' rights.

Thirdly, research on the offline rights demands of special groups of employees. This research mainly focuses on ordinary employees of different generations and has not yet focused on the offline rights demands of some special groups, such as the new generation of migrant workers, female employees, and remote working employees. Future research can conduct special studies on these special groups to analyze the uniqueness and influencing factors of their offline rights demands, such as female employees having higher demands for offline rights due to family responsibilities, and remote working employees facing the dilemma of blurred work-life boundaries and propose targeted management suggestions to promote the inclusiveness and fairness of offline rights management.

Finally, in the digital era, while introducing "offline rights" into legislation, China should also establish corresponding supporting measures based on the existing labor administrative legal framework and trade union legal system, so that workers can truly obtain the sufficient rest and free discretionary time in a continuously online cultural environment, thereby ensuring that workers can achieve comprehensive development and free growth in line with the times.

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