Gen Y in Workplace: An Exploratory Study

*Romiza Md Akhir and Noor Raihan Ab Hamid

Asia Graduate School of Business, UNITAR International University, Kelana Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia;

*Corresponding author: romiza@unitar.my

Abstract

The increasing number of Gen Y entering the workforce has urged organizations to change their views on workplace effectiveness. This is because Gen Y possesses certain characteristics that are different from generations before them. By understanding Gen Y’s work-related attitude and preferences, employers would be able to accommodate and implement the strategies aligned with gen Y’s strength and weaknesses. This exploratory study aimed to explore the work-related attitude of Gen Y in terms of the daily work routines and their work expectation. It is crucial for organizations to understand their preferences in developing effective ways to retain them in the organizations. Utilizing questionnaire surveys, data was collected from final year students who have undergone practical training and newly employed Gen Y in the workplace. Based on the difference characteristics posed by Gen Y compared to the previous generations, this study is aimed to compute the reliability of the scale in measuring the work-related characteristics of Gen Y.

Keywords: Gen Y, workplace.

Introduction

Current organizations are inspired to recruit the best talent that possess skills, knowledge and abilities in order to assist the organizational growth. The increasing number of Generation Y report for duty has urged organizations to change their normal perspective on workplace effectiveness. The reason is because they possess certain characteristics that are different from the previous generation. Shih and Allen (2007) define Generation Y, vary from beginning dates of 1977-1982 to ending dates of 1994-2003 (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008). They are confident, independent and individualistic, self-reliant and entrepreneurial (Martin, 2005) and has more priority to socialize collaborative, team oriented and have structured lives (Glass, 2007; Shih and Allen, 2007; Fairhurst).

Recent generation report for duty in the workforce is Generation Y. According the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2014), the population of Generation Y is slightly higher compared to Generation X and Baby Boomers. In 2014, Generation Y should be within the age of 14 till 33 years old. Therefore, they are applicable to be in the workforce.

Ideally, the group of Generation Y form up to 40% of workforce of the workforce in the year 2014 (Khim, 2013). Generation Y are at the beginning point in the workforce and will be the majority in the near future. By 2015, the generation are projected to fill 50% of the total workforce (Baba & Sliong, 2012).
This study is an exploratory study to understand Gen Y’s preferences on the work-related characteristics.

**Literature Review**

**Definition of Gen Y**

Generation Y, was born between 1982-2005 and is now aged 28 and younger (Toossi, 2009). There are varying dates for the birth years for Generation Y, for this study the years noted by Strauss and Howe (1991) will be used. Generation Y is the latest generation currently entering the workforce with members of its cohorts who are still in varying stages of schooling to include college.

**Characteristics of Gen Y**

Baby Boomers currently dominate the workforce and currently Generation Y only makes up 15% (Hill, 2004). However, Generation Y grew up during expansive economic times (Martin & Tulgan, 2006). This generation is technology savvy and seeks opportunities. Generation Y has grown up over-supervised and micromanaged by their parents, which suggests that some may lack time management skills. This cohort seems to have learned advanced motor, spatial, and strategy skills due to game technology. According to Zemke, Raines, and Filipczk (2000), even though Generation Y grew up in expansive economic time, one out of four within this cohort grew up impoverished. This suggests that Generation Y is more resilient, less materialistic, subscribes to higher ethical standards, and optimistic.

**Gen Y Work Related Preferences**

A study conducted by Josiam et al. (2009) on the work attitudes of Generation Y identified that this generation has a positive attitude and is more willing to assume work responsibility as long as the job is personally satisfying and challenging, and they do not have to work long hours. An on-going debate focus on how Generation Y is motivated and how it will manage a workforce (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). However, this cohort is able to negotiate due to being raised in a communicative and participatory environment. Generation Y also has a decrease in risky behaviours (Jenkins, 2008). Research by Lancaster and Stillman (2002) shows that Generation Y wants to work in a team environment, with a balance between work and life.

Based on the difference characteristics posed by Gen Y compared to the previous generations, this study is aimed to compute the reliability of the scale in measuring the work-related characteristics of Gen Y.

**Research Method**

**Questionnaire Design**

The questionnaire used in this study is adapted from the work of Broadbridge t. at. (2007), Szamosi (2006), and Arnold et. al. (2002). The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part is regarding the participant’s view of a range of work-related characteristics upon a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The second part of the questionnaire is the demographic data.

**Sampling**

Primary data for this research were collected using a personally-administered questionnaire as this method will ensure higher response rate. Research assistants helped in distributing and collecting the questionnaire in person. Secondary data for this study are from the newspapers, the Internet, journals and databases assessed using the Internet.

The respondents are mainly Gen Y students and newly employed Gen Y in Klang Valley. Using a stratified random sampling, questionnaires were distributed to Gen Y
students and those newly employed in workplace. A total of eighty responded to the survey.

Results and Discussion

Respondent Profile

Frequency distributions were calculated for all individuals in this research and summarized in Table 1. As indicated, 53.8% of the respondents were male. Most of the respondents were between 21-23 years of age (43.8 percent) followed by the age group of 18-20 and 24-26 at 28.8 percent and 22.5 percent. Majority of the respondents were from Business Administration programme (35%) followed by Hospitality and Tourism programme (21.3%), Others (12.5), Education (11.3%), Accounting (6.3%) and Information Technology (5%). More than half of the (52.4 percent) respondents were from Bachelor’s level, 42.3 percent were from the Diploma level, followed by Masters level (3.8%) and Foundation level (2.5%). 32.5 percent of the respondents had been in the employment between 1-2 years.

Table 1. Summary of respondent profile.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>21-23</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field of Study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24-26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>27-27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Above 30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin/Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality &amp; tourism</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Tech.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Analysis of internal consistency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work-related characteristics</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career-goals</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily work expectations</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.806</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cronbach’s Alpha was used in this study to measure internal consistency. According to George and Mallery (2003), there is no set interpretation as what is the acceptable alpha value, however, the general rule of thumb should be greater than 0.7. The analysis in Table 2 the alpha value that met the recommended acceptable value.

**Conclusions**

The aim of the study is to compute the reliability of the scales. The components of the scales are Gen Y’s career goals and daily work expectations. Both components were found to be internally reliable with the Cronbach’s Alpha value greater than 0.7. The findings will provide researchers as well as organisations to better understand the factors that drive and motivates Gen Y in their careers and, in turn, what factors may affect their decision to approach organisations and for Gen Y to remain as an employee in the longer term. Despite the attitude and behaviour that define Gen Y, employers have different views related to them. Employers feel that they do not possess the required skills prior to entering the workforce. By understanding Generation Y’s characteristics and preference, employers would be able to figure out and implement the strategies aligned with their strength and weaknesses.

**References**


