New generation – great expectations
Exploring the work attributes of gen y

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Abstract

From time immemorial there have been multiple generations of employees working together at workplaces but it is rightly asserted that future belongs to generation Y which is capable of becoming the most productive workforce in history whilst bringing in new wave of fresh ideas, energy and innovation at workplace. Being a new generation at workplace, attracting, recruiting and retaining them is a bone of contention for organizations which calls for developing an understanding of this generation holistically. The purpose of this paper is to provide an insight of the work characteristics available in literature about this generation by which organizations can best adapt themselves to make the most of the ambition and enthusiasm that this new generation offers. The methodology adopted for this paper is descriptive and approach is conceptual in which some broad factors have been identified on which work attributes of gen Y have been noted. Factors identified comprises of work, technology, money, social, entrepreneurship, job flexibility, job security & brand sensitive. Findings would enable authors to validate the assumption that this generation possesses unique work characteristics from earlier generations and thus labeling them as high maintenance workforce which asks for more than just the benefit package. Managerial implications of this paper lie in disseminating the information to the employers about the fast growing segment of today’s workforce so that this generation can be managed and engaged effectively. Human resources being the most important resource for contemporary organizations, scope for future work lie in a holistic understanding of work practices and aspirations of generation Y employees especially in
India where Y gen as per U.S Census bureau, 2011 makes up one quarter of world gen Y population, largest in the world.

**Keywords:** Generation Y, Millennial, Entrepreneurship, Technology

**Introduction**
Workplaces across the world is been served by employees from multiple generations. The senior most called as Veterans (1922 – 1945) standing on the verge of their retirement is making way for the then younger generations to take charge of affairs. Today’s workplace comprises of three generations namely Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980) and Generation Y (1981-2000) which is the newest and the largest cohort of generation entering the workforce.

In today’s workplace, one of the few constants is change. Ever changing technologies and shifting demographics have contributed to a marked imbalance. Talent in this world has become a major agent of economic growth which organizations look to tap to maintain a competitive advantage in the market place. In human resources perspective, most difficult change that organization experience is when new employees are hired, especially if they are young and from a generation first entering the workforce. Rapid technological advancements coupled with critical social and historical life events occurring during the same time has altered their preferences at workplace Vis – a – Vis influencing their attitude and behavior. There is much agreement that Generation Y has different work related characteristics from previous generations (Shaw and Fairhurst, 2008) [1]. With youth becoming part of the organizations there is a need to work with, engage and manage Generation Y employees differently from what is required to manage previous generation employees (e.g. Howe et al., 2000; Huntley, 2006; Smola and Sutton, 2002) [2,3,4]. This study focuses on understanding the work related attributes of Generation Y giving employers’ an opportunity to better understand this generation.

**Literature review**
Kupperschmidt (2000) has defined a generation as a recognized group of people who shares years of birth and significant life events at critical stages of development. Research suggests that each generation is likely to develop distinct work priorities and expectations from work (Jurkiewicz and Brown, 1998; Kupperschmidt, 2000) [5, 6]. There is a widespread agreement among most researchers that there are four broad generations of employees. The four broad generations categorized by (Hammill, 2005) [7] are as follows
- **Veterans.** Born between 1922 and 1945. It is also classified as seniors or traditionalists.
- **Baby Boomers.** Born between 1946 and 1964
- **Generation X.** Born between 1965 and 1980.
New generation – great expectations, Exploring the work attributes of gen y

- *Generation Y.* Born between 1981 and 2000. These are the newest entrants to workplace.

**Veterans** - Review of existing literature suggests that veterans respect authority, have a high sense of duty and see work as an obligation (Hammill, 2005). They have an individualistic style of working and prefer clear leadership through command and control (Hammill, 2005). They have a strong work ethic and prefer an element of discipline in the workplace (Murphy, 2010) [8]. They prefer formal mode of communication, probably through a memo (Hammill, 2005).

**Baby boomers** - Today’s workforce is dominated by baby boomers as it is currently the largest serving generation in the workforce. Existing literature points that baby boomers values job security and a stable working environment, they remain loyal and attached to the organization, and are idealistic, optimistic and driven (Hart, 2006; Smola and Sutton, 2002; Loomis, 2000) [9,4,10] . (Yu and Miller, 2003) [11] describes Baby Boomers as more diligent on the job, and value high degree of power within the organization (McCrindle and Hooper,2006) [12]. Baby Boomers prefers to follow consensual style of leadership whilst making decisions and with respect to mode of communication, they stand in contrast with veterans as they prefer to have personal touch in their communication.

**Generation x** - Generation X employees has a different relationship at work. People in Generation X are typically characterized as cynical, pessimistic and individualistic (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002) [5, 4]. They are self reliant and like to work in their own way. They don’t hesitate is asking questions from people around them which could be a potential source of conflict with veterans which would otherwise like that their experiences should be respected. They are more comfortable with change and diversity. They are more independent and self sufficient and don’t display loyalty to a particular organization than people from previous organizations (Hart, 2006) [9]. As a result they are more prone to job shifts to seek out more challenging options, a higher salary or improved benefits (Hays, 1999; Loomis, 2000) [13, 10]. They seek constant feedback and values a strong work life balance (Howe et al, 2000) [2].

**Objective** - To study the work attributes of Generation Y employees

**Significance**
All organizations are influenced by the values and the preferences of their next generation employees. It becomes highly indispensable to understand the work values of young individuals which would help organizations appreciate how to structure jobs, working conditions, compensation packages and human resource policies to attract, retain and engage Gen Y. Failure to understand the demands of this new generation entering the workplace can result in misunderstanding, miscommunication and will affect the employee productivity, innovation and corporate citizenship.
Methodology
The research of the present paper is descriptive and approach is conceptual. The methodology followed for this paper is that from literature some of the key factors have been identified on which work attributes pertaining to this generation have been noted to develop a better understanding of their way of doing work thus communicating the same to the employers with a view to bridge the gap between both the stakeholders.

Conceptual description of dimensions of work attributes
1. **Technology**: - They are the most technological proficient people at present who incorporate technology in a large part of their life and expect the same kind of technology supported infrastructure at their workplaces. It is the strong driver for Gen Y in the work environment.
2. **Entrepreneurship**: - They are forward thinkers with their mind work as “factory of thoughts” provoking ideas constantly and with hands-on experience, they could start their own venture making them the most entrepreneurial generation in history. The challenge for managers is to convince them that working for an organization has a greater appeal than self employment.
3. **Work**: - They value work with “yes, I can do” attitude and expect challenging and meaningful work roles from managers which could allow them to prove their skills and talent. Although they don’t like to be restricted in how they finish their task but ask for constant feedback and praise at work.
4. **Job flexibility**: - They value leisure to devote some time enjoying their private lives and thus ask for flexibility to achieve work life balance. Therefore management and culture of organization should appreciate such flexibility.
5. **Money**: - Being passionate to live luxuriously with a desire to spend on modern amenities, they expect handsome extrinsic rewards. The combination of “not wanting to work hard” but “still wanting more money” holds good for this generation. Switching jobs or venturing in to a business in search of higher compensation or meaningful work environment after couple of years is a casual activity.
6. **Social**: - Gen Y’s craving to remain connected with people has made them socially conscious fellows who make their presence felt virtually more than meeting in person. An online survey across 19 nations including India reveals that more than 8 out of 10 Gen Y internet users are members of at least 1 social networking site of which 56% use this medium for communicating and sending direct messages.
7. **Job security**: - Gen Y doesn’t pledge “job for life” instead “job hopping” is one of their pronounced characteristic. However they do value security provided jobs could give them the opportunity to learn transferable skills permitting them to switch jobs.
8. **Brand sensitive**: - Most Gen Y members are attention seekers. They try to gather fame by exercising choice and associating with brands that personify their character. Deciding for which organization to work for, they target for Numero Uno.
Scope for future work
Generation Y is the newest and the recent entrant in to workforce who is beginning to gain pull in the workplace. For a country like India where 65% of the population is under the age of 35, this generation can be an unmatched potential to achieve unparallel growth and development. Scope for future work lies in exploring the work values, motivational drivers, how to retain this workforce and develop them so that organizations can achieve sustained competitive advantage.

Conclusion
Representing the newest and the largest cohort of generation entering the workforce, Gen Y members are knocking the doors of the organizations with unique work attributes unlike those of the employees who preceded them. Being defined as those born in between “1980 – 2000”, the size of Gen Y in India is likely to be one - quarter of the world Gen Y population and accounts for largest in the world which is estimated to be 426 million. Moreover as per UNDP human development report, India will witness 63.5 million new entrants in to the workforce between 2011 and 2016, of which majority will be from 20 – 35 age group. Seeing the large brigade of workforce getting ready to deliver business and possessing the potential to become the highest producing workforce in history, the challenge for managers today is to develop an understanding of the character and expectations of these talented and demanding young adults to establish a harmonious connect with this generation in the interest of the organization. To conclude Gen Y employees need to be nurtured, trained and engaged very sensitively so as to extract best out of them which they are capable of delivering. Young employees in India alike their global counterparts are a powerhouse of capabilities that can create wonders but also poses some challenges as well. Thus organizations in pursuit of remaining sustainable in the market need to develop greater insights about this generation in order to serve them better and being served by them.

References


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