

# Chapter 17

## Generation Y and Job Satisfaction: Work Styles, Professional Expectations, and Career Concerns

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**Abstract** For about one decade now, the Generation Y has been entering the workforce in large numbers, which has given them the power to reshape the rules of play at work. Gen Y employees share many of the values of hard work and social consequences and demand more individual treatment and flexibility in training, work assignments, and work schedules. As the major test that faces organizations today is how to enhance job satisfaction within this new generation, this conceptual study aims to explore the work styles, professional expectations, and career concerns of Gen Y employees as the factors that could enhance their job satisfaction and to develop a preliminary job satisfaction model applicable to the Malaysian workforce. In-depth review of past literature was also made to further understand the elements that would lead to Gen Y more fulfilled at the workplace.

**Keywords** Generation Y • Job satisfaction • Work styles • Professional expectations

### 17.1 Introduction

Organizations today are seeing the arrival of the new generation of employees – the Generation Y (Gen Y – also referred to as the internet or dot.com generation, millennial, generation next, echo boomers, generation net, and nexters; [1–3]. As more baby-boomers retire, this sizable generation is entering the workforce by storm. This phenomenon has ignited concerns among academics and practitioners alike, over the repercussions of this new generation may have on our twenty-first

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century workplaces. At the forefront of these concerns is the notorious reputation Gen Y employees have for their unorthodox approach towards careers. They have different expectations than their previous generations, who mainly represent the management in organizations, which then results in a lot of conflict and frustrations to both parties. There is much agreement that Gen Y differs from previous generations in terms of work-related characteristics [3]. Nowadays, it is common to hear managers complaining about the newly hired and young employees as lacking in social skills, having little respect for authority, and not loyal to employers. The Gen Y is also described as “want it all” and “want it now”, in terms of good pay and benefits, rapid advancement, work/life balance, interesting and challenging work, and making a contribution to society.

## **17.2 Understanding the New Breed of Employees**

### ***A. Lack of Research Focus***

The major test that faces organizations today is how to enhance job satisfaction within this new generation that is characterized to be tech-savvy, entrepreneurial, and independent. Clearly, there is no one-size-fits-all management solution. Past researches on job satisfaction and motivating factors of Gen Y employees have proposed findings pointing in various directions. Meier and Crocker [4] highlighted factors managers must focus to motivate Gen Y: management styles, work relationship, work flexibility, and compensation. A lot of emphasis has been put on compensation as the main motivating factor [5] such as attractive salary, incentives (in a form of training and development, pay-for-performance strategy, and stock options), and nonfinancial awards (e.g., performers have access to top management leaders). Ng et al. [6] on the other hand claimed that opportunities for advancement, good people to work with and report to, developing new skills, and work-life balance are the desired work attributes of Gen Y.

However, far too little attention has been paid by researchers to understanding work styles, professional expectations, and career concerns of Gen Y employees. As a matter of fact, these factors have been highlighted as the three most important factors of job considerations among Gen Y [7]. In addition, it should be highlighted that most of the past studies on Gen Y have been undertaken by Western scholars. There is a lack of empirical research conducted to examine factors that enhance job satisfaction specifically among Gen Y in Malaysia. In Malaysia, approximately 36 % of the labor force is aged 29 and under – that is about 3.9 million Gen Y [8]. They are the ones who will shape the country’s social, economic, and political landscape in the future. Thus, it is important to find out what could enhance satisfaction among the Gen Y in order to help organizations in Malaysia improve retention, increase productivity, and eventually boost companies’ financial performance.

### **17.3 Sizing Up the Gen Y**

Gen Y has grown up in the digital age. Having lived in a digitally connected and globalizing world, Gen Y is the most technically literate, educated, and ethnically diverse generation in history [9]. They seek intellectual challenge, need to succeed, search for those who would help in their professional development, strive to make a difference, and measure its own success. They are competitive in nature but prefer to perform meaningful work that betters the world and working with committed teams with shared values. According to Lewis [10], Gen Y has mastered technology that multitasking has become a habit. This is evident by how they tend to instant message, listen to iPods, and revise a report all at once in their workplace.

Tolbzic [11] pointed out that Gen Y are also sometimes referred to as the “Trophy Generation” or “Trophy Kids” based on the emerging trends of rewarding everyone for participation in competition or challenge, rather than for winning. They are also adversely affected by the high rate of divorces and the “chain-to-work” life among their parents which did not appeal to them. As a result, Gen Y is thought to be skeptical to long-term commitments and is said to desire greater flexibility in their career [12].

#### ***A. The Challenge to Unlock Their Potential at Work***

Weyland [13] drew some interesting conclusions about Gen Y. He referred this generation as complex people with many contradictions. They are technology savvy but highly creative. They are environmentally conscious yet highly mobile. They expect instant rewards but also demand continuous development. They think like entrepreneur but tend to value relationships over money [13]. This puzzles employers as how to best manage and enhance their job satisfaction. Joel Stein, *Times* magazine (2013), claims that Gen Y could be a great force towards positive change and that according to their great mantra “challenge convention- find new and better ways of doing things” might definitely help organization to achieve greater heights. *Fortune* magazine (2007) reported that they are destined to be the most high-performing generation in history. The key is to find out how to unlock their potential and engage them in a workplace towards enhancing job retention and satisfaction.

### **17.4 Job Satisfaction and the Gen Y**

Job satisfaction is one of the most researched upon topic for the past few decades. Many studies vary in defining the term job satisfaction. In some instances, employee’s job satisfaction has been associated with how people think, feel, and

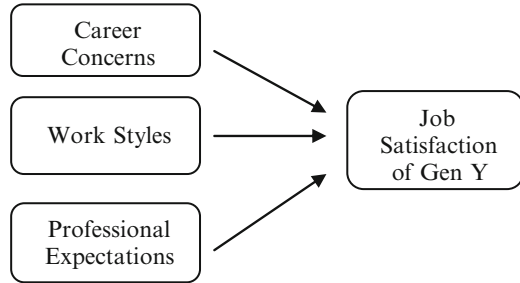
perceive the jobs [14]. Job satisfaction results from job appreciation or job achievement values and termed as ‘pleasurable emotion’ [15]. Luthans [16] refers to job satisfaction as an outcome of employee perceptions about the importance of the things that are provided by their jobs and an emotional response to the job that can only be inferred, outcomes of the job either meet or exceed expectations, and attitude towards the job. On a related note, Oshagbemi [17] defines job satisfaction as an emotional response that occurs as a result of the interaction between the worker’s values concerning his/her job and the profits gained from the job.

### ***A. Antecedents to Job Satisfaction***

Many different constructs have been researched as antecedents as well as consequences to job satisfaction. Researchers have frequently described job satisfaction as a complex phenomenon with unclear constructs that influence an employee’s positive feelings towards work. Findings from studies as to which factors are predominant in influencing job satisfaction are vast and there have been some inconsistencies with conclusions to research which warrant further investigation. This is especially the case when several cohorts of employees make up the research sample. There are many factors ranging from the physiological, psychological, and social needs [18]. Personal needs make up the most important aspect of workers’ satisfaction. However, work choice, the work itself, its place, working conditions, the level of knowledge required, its goals, leadership styles, wage, relationships among workers, and safety are considered as the other most important variables that affect satisfaction [7].

Feelings of an employee towards his/her job are influenced by myriad of forces caused by complex personal and situational circumstances surrounding that particular individual [19–22]. As presented by Herzberg under his Two Factor Theory, satisfaction is outlined by a multidimensional perspective. This theory suggests that job satisfaction is an outcome of two factors: hygiene factors (i.e., extrinsic, e.g., pay, work environment, and job security) and motivational factors (i.e., intrinsic, e.g., autonomy, recognition, and sense of accomplishment). Hygiene factors prevent or increase dissatisfaction, but do not lead to satisfaction. Hygiene factors prevent or increase dissatisfaction, but do not lead to satisfaction; whereas motivational factors contribute towards job satisfaction thus, increases satisfaction of employees at work place. Employers that employ these tactics (recognition, achievement, work itself, advancement, and possibility of growth) experienced greater job satisfaction and increased production. One would think that pay rise, more fringe benefits, and better work conditions could alleviate dissatisfaction at work and improve employee job satisfaction and motivation, but many management of organizations are perplexed when this solution did not work.

**Fig. 17.1** Proposed job satisfaction model of generation employees



## ***B. Focusing on the Quintessential***

Rather than reinventing the wheel and delve into saturated factors such as salary and benefits, this paper is grounded in elucidating ways to increase job satisfaction among Gen Y employees specifically through addressing their work styles, professional expectations, and career concerns as the main constructs in our study. Figure 17.1 illustrates the proposed conceptual framework. Underpinning the conceptual framework for our proposed study is a survey conducted by Robert Half International and Yahoo! Hotjobs in 2008. The proposed study takes one of the greatest challenges facing today's organizations and intends to feed back results and recommendations on how to deal with the Generation Y employees. Work styles, professional expectations, and career concerns are, by far, considered the most critical factors that motivate Gen Y and what they expect from their employers. For the purpose of this study and as supported by the Herzberg Two Factor Model, salary and benefits are not included in the proposed study. As stated by the theory, salary and benefits are hygiene factors where it only prevents dissatisfaction but do not increase satisfaction [20].

## ***C. Career Concerns***

Concern about career is considered as one of the top most important aspect to a Gen Y in any organisation. Every Gen Y is very eager to ensure they get growth and development and move up the ranks in shortest time possible. Thus, they are always hungry for stimulation and like to be challenged. They are also concerned about having a guaranteed employment hence making sure that they have continued financial security and job stability.

According to Baruch [23], a career involves a process of progress and development of individuals. Arnold [24] defines a career as a sequence of employment related positions, roles, activities, and experiences encountered by a person. With regard to their careers, Gen Y have a drive for career success and security, craving for opportunity and responsibility [25]. Their own development is so important to

the extent that they expect substantial contribution from their employer in this area. Reported in the survey by Robert Half [7], the top reason why Gen Y would leave a company is when there are no opportunities for career development.

The five most important factors under career development for Gen Y in order of importance are promotion and growth, achievement at work, career path planning, training and development, and challenging work [26]. While traditional linear career structure within the same organisation is often sought after, there are however more evidence of transactional and short-term relationship happening as indicated by Arthur [27]. It is estimated that a typical Gen Y will have had ten jobs by the age of 38. The term “job for life” no longer exists and Gen Y will leave an organisation once they feel no opportunity is given or if they feel they are becoming stagnant. Another theory by Hall and Mirvis [28] described that a career is an “individual” thing rather than an organisation, who takes responsibility for their own career. This “individual” thing is what the Gen Y focus at, which is their livelihood and career satisfaction.

Therefore, it is fundamental for employers to understand that Gen Y long for continuous development and is always seeking for challenging tasks. Employers should offer career progression that is nontraditional which may involve changing functions, industries, and sectors [13]. The onus is also on employers to establish a new career path opportunities and make known to them that options are available for them to assume new roles as soon as they are ready to do so. Cross-functional projects could be encouraged to stimulate the high interaction and connection that Gen Y have with people.

According to the PricewaterhouseCoopers’ (PWC) 12th Annual Global CEO survey in 2008, training and development are the most prized benefits among the graduates compared to cash and bonuses. They understand the potential power of skills and knowledge could benefit them in the long term rather than having the instant cash and bonuses. Gen Y recognise that this is the real benefit that could increase their individual opportunity of development and advancement in the future. Hence, employer should create a continuous learning environment where skills are developed at a steady pace.

In view of the past literature as highlighted above, career concerns play an important aspect to the job satisfaction of Gen Y. There is evidence to consider that career growth and development, continuous learning and skills enhancement can be contributing factors towards the relationship between Gen Y’s career concerns and job satisfaction.

#### ***D. Work Styles***

Researchers concur that the major challenge which faces organizations today is how to attract, engage, and retain Gen Y employees who because of their unprecedented exposure to a totally different environment in growing up have altered their experiences and attitudes towards work [29–31]. The proliferation of the internet

and social networks, for instance, has spawned a new breed of employees who openly broadcasts their likes and dislikes without hesitation. Work styles like preferences in attire, choices in communication, work-breaks, and need for leisure have all been given a fresh breath compared to the times of the baby-boomers and even Generation X [33].

According to Arnold [24], Gen Y listed work environment as a motivational characteristic that they are looking for in the workplace. They seek camaraderie, friendship with coworkers, and working with people that they enjoy working with. They do not expect to be stuck at their workstation all day without having any communication with colleagues. They seek out for a workplace where they can have a good time. Many companies in the Western countries have started to embark on this by giving free trips to the movie, summer half days, and company outings that bring workers together. Creative perks although small are ways companies had initiated to keep Gen Y employees fresh and motivated.

Generation Y wants even more flexibility in the work-life balance, compared to the previous generations. Gen Y puts priority in fulfilling relationship with family and friends and will make sure that their jobs could accommodate their personal lives [32]. They are also very open to working from home and have no issue to working anywhere and at any time. As they are always connected with the support of technology, work can be mobile. However, Gen Y grew up having more leisure time than the earlier generations. They are quite averse to working long hours and high pressure work that may not interest them if there is no extra compensation [5].

Thus, jobs assigned to Gen Y must be carefully thought out. They crave jobs that have clear set goals and ensured quick completion for them to move on to the next. They are always in search of challenge and readily willing to assume responsibility. They do not like to sit back and would feel restless if no task is given to them. Gen Y grew up being a multitask individual in various aspects of life, and this can be observed by the multiple tasks that they have to carry out in school, sports, and at home [4]. Parents of Gen Y made sure that their children do not miss out on opportunities and thus enroll them in all kinds of activities.

Therefore, based on the literature as presented above, many elements of work styles that appeal and reflect positively to Gen Y's values will be judged favorably and contribute to the development of congruency between Gen Y's work styles and job satisfaction.

### ***E. Professional Expectations***

Besides general work styles, cited in literature, are the Gen Y employees who bring along professional expectations with lower levels of trust and loyalty to corporate structures due to constant exposure (especially through social media platforms) to corporate scandals and incidences of corporate downsizing [33]. Martin [2], for instance, refers to this generation as extremely digitally savvy, rejecting micro-management and having a thirst for empowerment as well as autonomy. Inevitably,

this has led to the need to adjust management styles and more importantly to understand the actual demand towards management in terms of professional expectations.

As with professionals of all ages, the quality of relationship of a Gen Y employee with his/her superior is directly linked to job satisfaction. One has to remember that Gen Y is accustomed to depending on the attentive teaching from their parents and teachers. As a result, they are more likely to expect a similar relationship with their superior and look forward to regular feedback [5]. From the survey conducted by Robert Half International [7], tops the list to what Gen Y described their dream boss were good management skills, pleasant and easy to get along with, understanding and caring, flexible and open minded, and respects/values/appreciates employees. This group has high expectation on who they look up to as their boss. A boss with good management style is in the best position to motivate Gen Y employees. Thus, pairing these employees with a weak leadership that has high level of bureaucracy will only make the Gen Y more prone to leave even if they enjoy the job [13]. Gen Y employees are motivated when given the freedom to work as they please. They do not like a superior to hover at them every second but they do expect regular feedback. They want to know how well they have done on a particular job and would not mind receiving a constructive feedback, whether it is positive or negative. However, the superior must be able to guide and help train them to the best they can. Any feedback needs to be given honestly and clearly, and that mutual respect in a relationship is of vital importance to Gen Y.

This leads to the high professional expectation of Gen Y of their managers. They hope for their superior to be more of a mentor and supporting coach. Providing them a big picture so that they are able to understand how their everyday work contributes to the overall impact and success of the organisation. According to Meier and Crocker [4], "Direction is important. You want to have a good mentor that will give you a sense of direction rather than having you aimlessly reaching." To the Gen Y, if there is no sense of purpose or benefits from the efforts rendered, then it is all a waste of time. Therefore, as to keep the Gen Y motivated, it is very critical that employers must recognise how their efforts could add value to the organisation by providing clear direction and good leadership.

As indicated by Yeaton [34], Gen Y places a strong opinion on social responsibility. They are attracted to jobs with social significance, i.e., strong values, social ethics, distinctive brands, and non-hierarchical environments [13]. In the recent study by Ng et al. [6], 69 % of the 400 respondents expressed a genuine interest in the environment but admitted to a lack of personal involvement in green-related activities. Thus, organisations have to ensure that their corporate social responsibility policy is up to date. It should reflect the values and ethics of the company. Hence, good superiors that support and understand, regular feedback or more "face time," clear direction and translating into the big picture, and commitment to corporate social responsibility can be classified as some of the aspects under professional expectations of Gen Y. And these elements are believed to be contributing towards the relationship between Gen Y's professional expectations and job satisfaction.



## 17.5 Implications

This paper adds to the body of knowledge on Gen Y employees, a generational cohort that is not well understood by employers and yet perhaps is very critical due to its different expectations compared to the earlier generational cohort and the influence they bring about to the overall workforce. New measurement scales of work styles, professional expectations, and career concerns are to be developed as the framework of job satisfaction model for the Gen Y. The novelty of this research is that it does not take into account the element of salary or pay as the main factors to job satisfaction. Although to many, salary is perceived as the main contributor to an employee's satisfaction at workplace. As stated by the Herzberg Two Factor model of motivation, salary is a hygiene factor which does not boost job satisfaction level but only prevent from further dissatisfaction if it were to be increased. Thus, this concept is applied in the development of the conceptual framework. In addition to this, findings from the survey conducted by Robert Half International and Yahoo! Hotjobs in 2008 were the basis for the decision to include the respective constructs. From the survey, work styles, professional expectations, and career concerns are among the top factors that motivate Gen Y and that could retain them in organizations and the proposed study takes on an applied approach towards this critical phenomenon facing organizations today.

Further to this study would be the proposition to investigate the correlation between work styles, professional expectations, and career concerns of Gen Y and job satisfaction, as well as distinguishing which factor contributes the most to their job satisfaction level. This conceptual paper examines the various literatures with regard to the Gen Y and job satisfaction. Many constructs were revealed as the influencing factors of job satisfaction for employees in general. However, for the purpose of this paper, in-depth review of past literature was made to further understand the elements that would lead to Gen Y more fulfilled at the workplace. Even though there were many studies conducted in the past on Gen Y's expectation at the workplace, none has specifically looked at the work style aspects, professional expectations, and career concerns in parallel. Thus, this paper proposes that these three constructs be investigated concurrently and alongside the construct of job satisfaction among Gen Y employees. This with hope would enlighten the human resource practitioners in their efforts to stimulate Gen Y in engaging and thus retaining them longer in the organization. Future research should empirically test the propositions introduced in this paper. The factors highlighted, need to be thoroughly examined to be better understood, and catered as recommendations for the Gen Y.

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