Creating A Sense of Belonging For Gen Y at The Workplace

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Abstract

The upbringing of today's world has focused much on the advancement of the use of technology and where works are also technology driven. Correspondingly, the IT-Savvy are the Generation Y also known as "Gen Y". The Gen Y are mostly immersed in the use of technology from an early age. They are more energetic, futuristic, multi-tasking, and are motivated towards their work. Despite the technology driven generation, they are also people oriented where meeting people and making networking are essential. As compared to the other three generations such as the Silent Generations, Baby Boomers, and Generation X; Generation Y prefer challenging and meaningful work that could lead to work betterment. The increasing number of young gen Y employees has made the study an important aspect of research. The purpose of running this short study is to identify the current trends in the workforce arena which involves Gen Y. This paper also discusses on the categorization of Gen Y, managing Gen Y, and specifically on creating a sense of belonging for Gen Y. Discussions on random surveys for gen Y employees in selected areas in Malaysia has been done. The survey in the form of one to one interview took place at malls and office buildings in Klang Valley targeted at random number of employees ranging from all facet of working sector. A number of 35 samples were successfully interviewed.

Keywords: Generation Y, categorization of gen Y, managing gen Y, Malaysia

Introduction

The emergence of technology has led to the significant changes to the compositon of todays workforce. An organization has long been functioning with the mixture of four types of generation. These generations are The Silent Generation (pre-1946), The Baby Boomers (19461964), Generation X (1964-1979), and Generation Y also known as Gen Y (1979 – current) (Paul, P, 2001). Each generation have their own beliefs and value system in conducting work. This therefore creates differences in between generations. Thus, it is important for the employer to understand and respect the differences that manifest the four generations in the same workplace as to create harmony. The issue of not understanding the Gen Y has caused challanges for managers and organizations today. By this, an organization needs to create a sense of belonging for Gen Y at the workplace through a more flexible and balance work activities that could boost up their motvation and performance level and increase retention level.

This mixture of generations has positive impact on a running of an organization. Unfortunately, as the talented baby boomers starts to retire, this somehow has led to skills shortages and difficulties in identifying new best talent for an organization. Shortages in skills and difficulties in identifying new best talents causes competition among organizations. This commotion has left the Gen X and Gen Y to replace the baby boomers. However, to retain the essense of the talent and skills from the baby boomers, organization need to move their attention and focus to the later generation which is Gen X and Gen Y. Thus, since Gen Y are more prevailent in this techno-global talent search, it is crucial to give them primary attention.

Since the upbringing of todays world is focusing much on the advancement of the use of technology and where works are also technology driven, Gen Y is very much the focus point. Correspondingly, most of the IT-

Savvy experts today are the Generation Y. The Gen Y are mostly immersed in the use of technology from an early age. They are more energetic, futuristic, multi-tasking, and are motivated towards their work (Spiro, C., 2006). Despite the technology driven generation, they are also people oriented where meeting people and making networkings are essential. Employees from this generation prefer making a short-term working commitment in their organization of one year at the minimum. Gen Y are do not like to be pushed for work and giving daily report to their superior. They prefer a seldom report of work but with a more flexible ways. New experiences that opens new challenges and new opportunities are some of the demands that has been brought up by gen Y. They want their skills and capabilities engaged in their works rather than getting recognized to the world (Martin, C. A., 2005).

Literature Review

Characteristics of Gen Y (Who are Gen Y?)

Generation Y are those born between the year 1978 and 1988. They are risk taking, blunt, techno-savvy, and posesses other intriguing quality which is contradicting from the baby boomers and the other group of generations, (Martin, C. A., 2005). Some of the identified characteristics include their origin, value system, preferences, decision making, and their relationship with employers. Gen Y usually gets the help of their social network to make a decision on certain new products and/or services. They also tend to share and spread the experience and benefits of the purchased products or services to their social network. Since Gen Y are often connected with the each other, they learn quickly and engage with their social networks. They also read and process information at a different pace and ways as compared to the other three generations. This has led to a differences in the perception towards work, different work ethic and different working relationships with the other generations. They prefer challenging and advanterous work that can build their skills and competencies (Kultalahti, S., & Viitala, R., 2015). The table below describes the characteristics of Gen Y in general.

Table 1: Characteristics of Gen Y

	Generation Y
Who they are	☐ Born between 1978-1995
Tagline(s)	☐ "Like Xers on steroids"
Values	☐ Immediate feedback and payoff
	☐ Hard work pays off
	☐ Technology; creativity
Preferences	☐ High expectations of personal and financial success
	☐ Seek challenging, meaningful work that impacts their world
	☐ Do not like being treated as the new kid on the block
Decision making	☐ Use social networking for opinion
Relationship to Employer	☐ Most high-maintenance generation to ever enter the work force
	☐ Little loyalty to an employer; not intimidated by authority

Source: Black, A. (2010)

Managing Gen Y

Managing Gen Y is one of the important ways to retain and train the future talent. Their existance is a means of opportunities for employers and HR practitioners to invest in retaining and training the talent of Gen Y. Managing Gen Y employees with proper constitutions can lead to seeding loyalty in them towards the organization or place of work (Hewlett, S. A., Sherbin, L., & Sumberg, K., 2009).

Since Gen Y are naturally wary of constructive issues, overt on technical works and communications that are less than transparent, organization should strategize into managing them carefully. An act of hiring and conducting activities at work for Gen Y must include a robust on-line strategy as they are a generation with a robust used of technology and is technology driven (Hills, C., Ryan, S., Warren Forward, H., & Smith, D. R., 2013). Organizations and employers need to understand the unique characteristics of Gen Y in order to capture the hearts and minds of Gen Y employees now and in the future. A customized talent program to suit their preferences can also be done to attract and retain Gen Y. To attract gen Y, some of the ways includes 1) Train the interviewer, 2) Nominate role models in Organization, 3) Increase the number of Gen Y activities and engagements in organization, 4) Create a
Performance based culture, 5) Promote the branding of Organization, and 6) Implement an effective employee referral program.

Creating a sense of belonging for Gen Y

About 89% of Gen Y said that flexible work is important and about 87% said that work-life balance matter to them. To some extent, about 83% of Gen Y said that freedom at work motivates them to do a level of 110% efforts on work (Hewlett, S. A., Sherbin, L., & Sumberg, K., 2009). This is why motivating Gen Y serve as important in the urge to create a sense of belonging in them towards the organization they work for. To create a sense of belonging some of the ways an organization or a boss should do includes 1) Design a comprehensive orientation or on-boarding program, 2) Offer more responsibilities, 3) Give more ownership, 4) Provide flexibility at work, 5) Communicate regularly and find out what they want, 6) Have lesser performance review cycles and regular feedback sessions, 7) Build relationships around people, 8) Give instant recognition, 9) Provide opportunities for self and professional development, and 10) Create fun work environments.

One other ways to instill a sense of belonging to the gen Y is through the implementation of flexi benefits replacing the traditional benefits. Flexi benefits are benefits that can be customized to suit the needs and relevancy of gen Y (TM Annual report, 2013). Some giant companies such as Telekom Malaysia, Maxis, Axiata and many others has an option of flexi benefits offered to their employees. This customization of work benefits suited the Generation Y since they want jobs with flexibility and telecommuting options that allow them to work, yet at the same time give them the opportunity to leave the workplace temporarily to care for children. The flexi scheme also provides a new and flexible medical benefit to replace the old and rigid benefits.

Methodology

This short study has been done qualitatively with interviews as its main tools. The number of samples were also toned down from 50 to 35 as random interviewing of public is very difficult to conduct. Thus, a number of 35 respondents from variety of work sectors were interviewed at places such as malls and open streets. The interview only took 10 minutes for each respondents. Since this is a short imperical study, the locations were limited to areas around Klang Valley.

Findings And Discussions

Random Interview on Gen Y

A short interview were done at random among Gen Y in Malaysia. The interview covered four sections on generation's Y which includes, **section 1** on their envisioning in five years time, **section 2** on perspectives on their leader's preferences, **section 3** on workplace environment, and **section 4** workplace motivators. About a number of 35 participants were interviewed successfully. To run the interviews, we had combined questions

related to gen Y characteristics, ways of managing gen Y, and to create a sense of belonging to gen Y. The participants' age ranges from 24 to 32 that falls under the categorization of Gen Y itself. About 20 out of 35 participants were male and the remaining 15 were female. Most of the participants are those with a degree as their highest qualification. While career of the participants varies which includes a Bank Manager, IT specialist, Engineer, Sales person, Pharmasist, Doctor, and a Clerk.

The findings generally explained that most of the gen Y were looking for an optimistic and meaningful work that can satisfy their pashion and likes. Being given empowerment and engagement is what most are asking for rather than recognition and a pat in the back. They wanted to have an ideal career that suits their skills and abilities at the same time receiving high salary payment.

Section 1

Crucial question such as "where they see themselves in 5 years time?" were questioned to see the holistic view of work from the generation y. To answer this question, three options of anwers were given which include (1) I can envision staying in the company/ place of work for the rest of my career, (2) I believe that within 5 years I may have to make change, and (3) I plan on definitely leaving the company/ place of work within this 5 years. Paragraphs and table below will summarize the results of the intense interview.
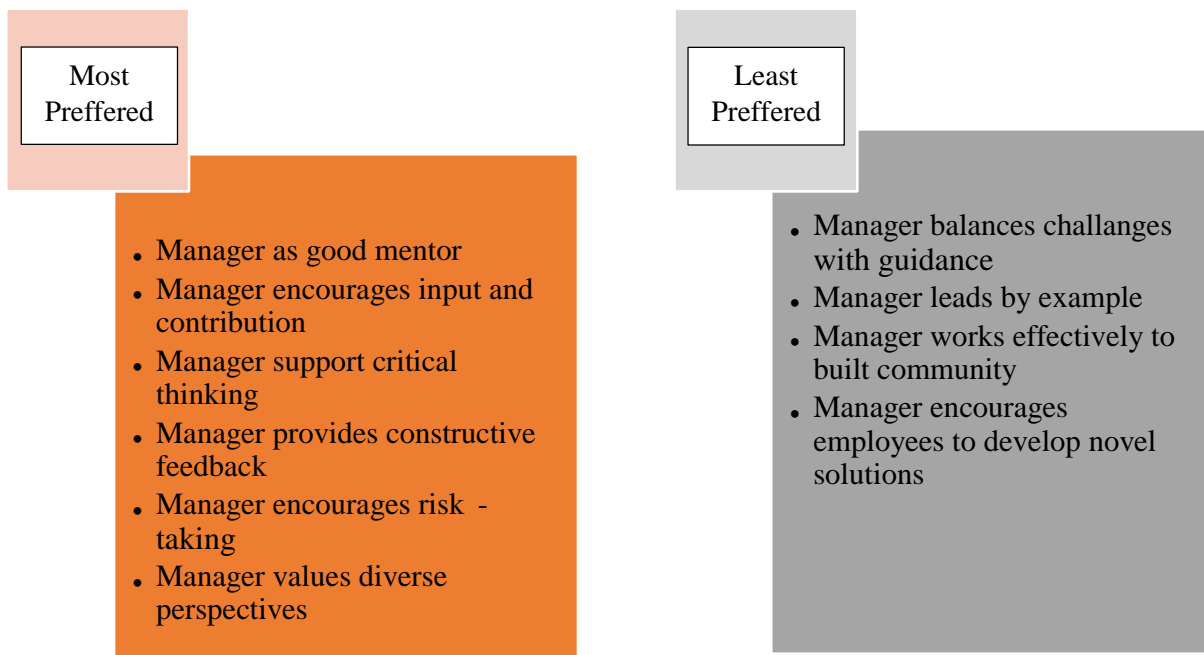
Table 2: gen Y 5 years vision

Where do you see youself in 5 years time?	
I can envision staying in the company/ place of work for the rest of my career	2
I believe that within 5 years I may have to make change	16
I plan on definitely leaving the company/ place of work within this 5 years	17
	35

The table above conclude that Gen Y mostly see themselves taking the risk of making changes to their work, and planning to leave the company/ workplace for a better offer within 5 years time. About 16 participants believe they can contribute to changes, while about 17 participants believed that opting for a better offer by leaving the company is of better choice. Out of the 35 participants of Gen Y, none plan to stay in the same company/ work for their whole life career in the same company. They either wants to make changes or leave for a better offer. Thus, only two prefer staying with the company for the whole life career.
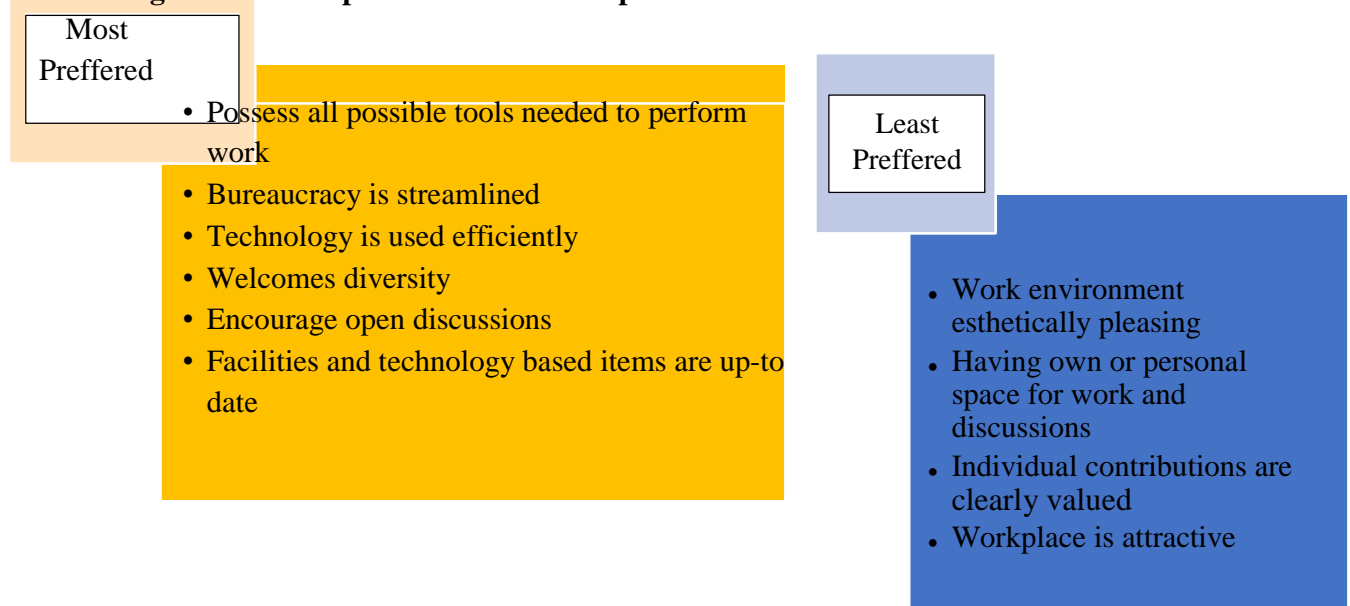
Section 2
Figure 1: Gen Y preferences on leaders

Most Preffered	Least Preffered
• Manager as good mentor • Manager encourages input and contribution • Manager support critical thinking • Manager provides constructive feedback • Manager encourages risk - taking • Manager values diverse perspectives	• Manager balances challanges with guidance • Manager leads by example • Manager works effectively to built community • Manager encourages employees to develop novel solutions

To understand the leaders, bosses or managers, an employee has their guideline on what to expect of a leader. The analysis of the interview has shown that most and the least of what the employee prefers. Boxes above indicates the expectations of most employees on their leaders or managers at the workplace. Most generation Y expect that their leaders or managers to have a good mentoring ability, have the will to encourage input and contribution, support critical thinking, provides constructive feedback to work, encourages risk-taking, and values diverse perspectives from the employees. While a leader or manager that balances challanges with guidance, lead by example, work to build community, and encouragement to develop new solutions has the least expectation from gen Y.

Section 3 Figure 2: Gen Y preferences on Workplace environment

Most Preffered	Least Preffered
• Possess all possible tools needed to perform work • Bureaucracy is streamlined • Technology is used efficiently • Welcomes diversity • Encourage open discussions • Facilities and technology based items are up-to date	• Work environment esthetically pleasing • Having own or personal space for work and discussions • Individual contributions are clearly valued • Workplace is attractive

Having good and conducive work environment is always a general requirement of an employees. Thus, the study has conclude that generation Y today working in various sectors has a mutual understanding of the work environment that they want. They preffered their organization to have tools needed to perform work, a streamlined of bureaucracy, and efficiently used of technology, diversity at work, open discussions, and to have facilities and technology based items up-to-date. While workplace environment that is esthetically pleasing and interesting with own or personal space for work and discussions, as well as valuing individual contributions are of less preffered by gen Y.

Section 4
Figure 3: Workplace motivators

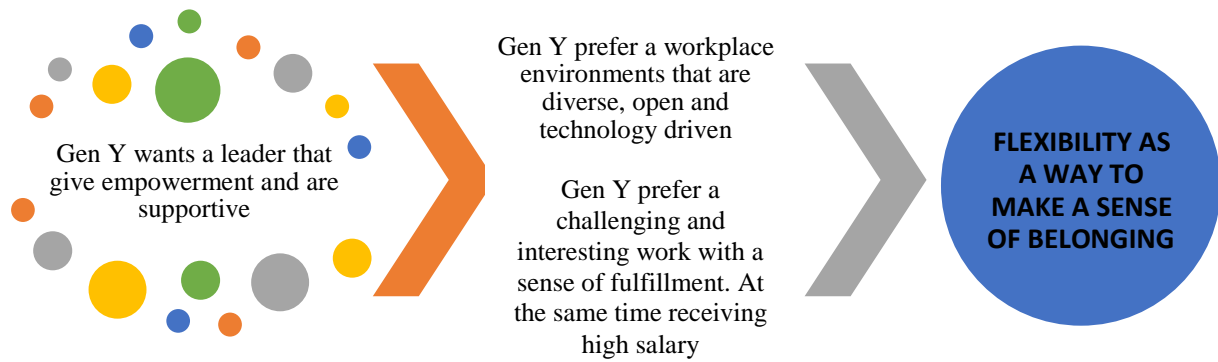| Most Preffered	Least Preffered
• Ongoing education • A sense of fulfillment • Challenging work • Work with technology • Intrinsically interesting work • Travel opportunities • Excellent pay	• Unique work • Opportunities for personal/ professional development and advancement • Being recognized for contributions and achievements
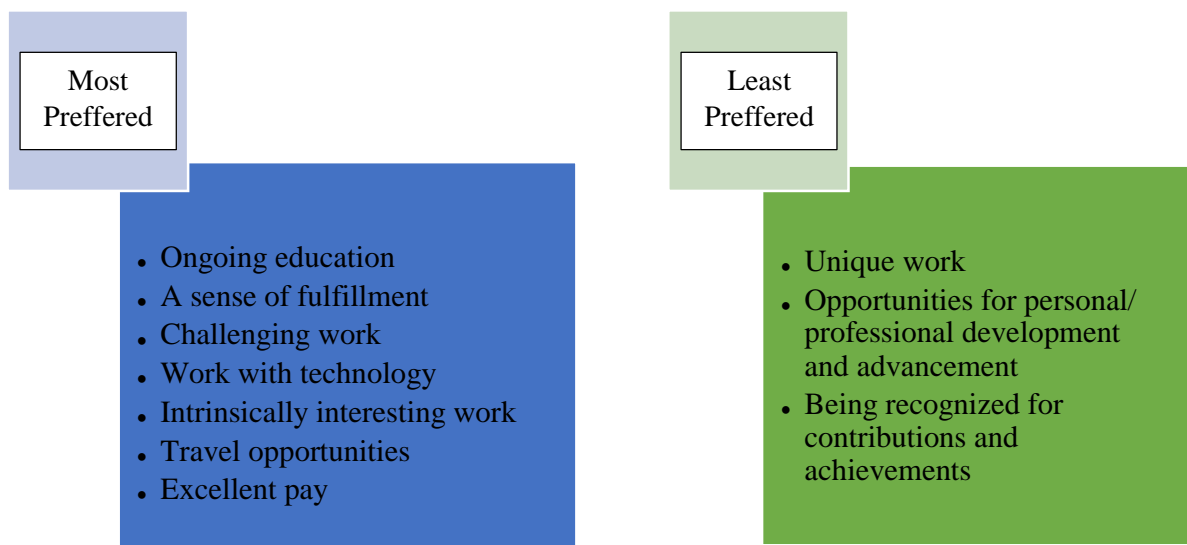
To make the employees part of the organization, the aspect of motivation must not be left out of the analysis. Thus, the importance of identifying their motivations towards the workplace has shown emersed agreement among the gen Y. Most generation Y agreed that an ongoing education provided by their organization is one of their great expectation. They wanted a sense of fulfillment while doing work, likes performing challenging work, likes working with technology either current or new, enthusiast in performing interesting work, prefer works with travelling opportunities rather than staying all day long in the office, and also a high salary payment. On the other hand, unique work, opportunities for personal or/and professional development, and being recognized for contributions and achievements are not a frequent motivating factors at the workplace for gen Y.

Conclusions

To create a sense of belonging for gen Y, the result has shown that gen Y wanted a career aspirations rather than guidance and recognitions. Most top talented Gen Y prefers challenges over spoon fed or orders. They likes the challenge of figuring out ''the best way to do the job'' whether they do it on their own or in a team. Organizations must ensure their management style needs to be flexible enough to plan time for trial and error, factoring in their pacing and need for collaboration. Section 1- 4 in the finding section has concluded that the generation Y wants more flexibility in many aspect of work.

Figure 4

• I believe that within 5 years I may have to make change • I plan on definitely leaving the company/ place of work within this 5 years

Gen Y wants a leader that give empowerment and are supportive

Gen Y prefer a workplace environments that are diverse, open and technology driven

Gen Y prefer a challenging and interesting work with a sense of fulfillment. At the same time receiving high salary

FLEXIBILITY AS A WAY TO MAKE A SENSE OF BELONGING

A way forward

The fulfilling wants of gen Y from this short study shows great importance in creating flexibility in many major parts of the working facet. Flexibility can be one of the ways to create a sense of belonging for this generation. Flexibility can also make them stay more than 5 years if done properly. Many companies in Malaysia have attributed their employment schemes in flexible terms. As such, flexible working hours, flexible benefits, flexible office venues, and much other flexibility just to suit the likes of this fast moving generation Y.

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