

Dancing with little dragons: matching potential hires' aspirations with expectations of businesses

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Abstract

Gen Y/Millennials employees have become an important part of enterprise development. Compared with previous generations, this new generation shows higher expectations of work context and participation in management. Globalization and the explosion of new technologies have led to a situation where new employees must equip themselves skills and knowledge to adapt to the fast-changing environment. We explore Gen Y employees' aspirations, the expectations of businesses and identify the fit and gaps between both sides. 6,000+ surveys produce data to inform businesses to develop Gen Y employees and to harness their talents.

Key words: *millennials, recruitment, enactus, human resource management, employment trends*

1 Introduction

In recent years, the social and economic environment has changed dramatically. With the accelerating pace of economic globalization, the intensity of competition among businesses has continually increased. Thus, businesses are focusing on their strategies and developing their core competitive advantages to stay in the game. Human resources have become an important part of the sustainable development of an enterprise.

In the 21st century, Generation Y/ Millennials¹ (the younger generation) employees have become a major factor in enterprise development. In China, they are the first generation that

¹ Although definitions vary for the age range of Generation Y and Millennials, there is consensus that the main target group of this paper are defined as both Generation Y and Millennials. (For example, see

receive higher education generally. In the past, if a person had a bachelor's degree, he/she would easily find a good job. But nowadays, elite education has evolved into mass education. Businesses would look to hiring a prospect candidate with both relevant educational background and adequate employability skills.

As for the employer, attracting and retaining talents have become an important issue for their businesses. With the rising number of Gen Y employees, employers need to keep up with this phenomena so as to better understand Gen Y employees through different ways. In order to attract and retain talents, businesses have resorted to use some means such as establishing a more flexible talent management mechanism, flatter organization structure, etc. The purpose of the study is to explore Gen Y employees' aspirations and the expectations of businesses, and identify the gaps and fit between both sides so that both employers and employees can better understand each other and match potential hires' aspirations with expectations of businesses

2 Experimental

2.1 The Generation Y employees

Due to differing socio-economic backgrounds, each generation of employees have different characteristics, values, behaviors and expectations. In order to understand the generational diversity and improve the competencies of organizations, especially with regards to talent attraction and retention, a lot of research has been done by domestic and foreign academia. In this paper, the younger generation employees that we are referring to are the Generation Y (Gen Y)/ Millennials. Gen Y is a descriptor that is used to identify and label the newest generational cohort entering the workforce (L. Dulin, 2005)². Gen Y employees have become a stronger and larger group in the workplace.

Compared with traditional employees, Gen Y Chinese has characteristics of self-realization orientation and interpersonal harmony orientation. As such they pay great attention to the collective interests and also pursue for self-value (H. C. Xu, Y. Zheng, and X. T. Huang, 2008)³. They pursue openness and fairness, dislike traditional hierarchy and are more used to

<https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/03/here-is-when-each-generation-begins-and-ends-according-to-facts/359589/>). Thus, we will refer to our target group as Gen Y and Millennials interchangeably.

² L. Dulin, "Leadership Preferences of a Generation Y Cohort: A Mixed Method Investigation," Doctoral Dissertation, University of North Texas, 2005.

³ H. C. Xu, Y. Zheng, and X. T. Huang, "Research on Chinese young people's life value," *Journal of Southwest University (social sciences edition)*, vol. 52, pp. 35-39, October 2008.

the democratic and consultative mode of communication (Yuhua Xie, Jia Chen, and Peipei Chen, 2014)⁴. They do not like to work overtime and do not want their private time is occupied by work. At the same time, they also know how to collaborate with team members to complete tasks (C. J. Yang, R. Liu and T. R. Li, 2013)⁵. Gen Y Chinese employees want individualism and collectivism in a win-win relationship. They do not have preconceived notions. Rather, they have broad interests, and their thoughts and actions change quickly. In addition, they have a wide variety of important features (Qing Xia, Hongyan Li, 2013)⁶.

2.2 Employability Skills

When businesses come to college career fairs looking to hire, they are in fact looking for a broad set of skills (Doyle, 2011)⁷. Employees are keen to know what skills that employers value most and hope to match their expectation by equipping some critical skills. So, what is employability skills? The definition of the employability skills is not that clear. Employability skills can be referred to generic skills (UWA, 1996)⁸ or workplace basic and know-how skills (Hollenbeck, 1994)⁹.

2.3 Talent Attraction and retention

The management consulting company McKinsey reported that employers face a “war for talents”. It’s hard for businesses to recruit talented people. Since then, talent attraction and retention has become a hot topic for both literature and business practices. It has been claimed

⁴ Yuhua Xie, Jia Chen, and Peipei Chen,” Influence of Organization Cultural Internal Integration Perception on New Generation Employees’ Job Satisfaction”, *Journal of Economics, Business and Management*, Vol. 2, No. 2, May 2014.

⁵ C. J. Yang, R. Liu and T. R. Li, “Multinational Why Expatriates Back after Leaving Office Frequently? Work- Based Embedding Theory Interpretation,” *Northeastern University (Social Science Edition)*, No. 1, 2013, pp. 44- 49.

⁶ Qing Xia, Hongyan Li, “The Incentive Problems Study of the Employees of the New Generation under the Structure of Grade in China”, *American Journal of Industrial and Business Management*, 2013, 3, 715-718

⁷ Doyle, T. (2011). *Learner Centered Teaching: Putting the Research in Learning into Practice*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

⁸ UWA (The University of Western Australia). (1996). *Generic skills survey*, Careers Advisory Board, The University of Western Australia.

⁹ Hollenbeck, K. (1994). *The workplace know-how skills needed to be productive* (Technical report). MI: Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 413 712).

to be “more critical than ever to organizational strategic success” and a “fast gaining top priority for organizations across countries” (Hartmann, et al. 2010)¹⁰.

3 Research methodology

This research aims to understand the new generation employees’ career aspiration and the expectation of businesses, and come out with some conclusions to better match the requirements from both employers’ and the new generation employees’ sides. The methodology used is literature review and questionnaire survey- *winning with post 90s in China 2015*, which was implemented by *Generation Leadership Academy*. The survey has been conducted on two different samples, namely employers and undergraduates. Total 6200 effective questionnaires were collected from university students and 500 from young professionals.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 The New Generation Employees

4.1.1 The View on Gen Y

The same views on Gen Y from Gen Y and employers: More than 20% of CEOs chose “creative” to describe Gen Y, which was the only one word that was chosen by HRs, university students and Gen Y in workplace. Objectively, Gen Y grew up in the environment that more people can receive higher education and the access to information is much richer than before in general. Thus, they are ready for trying new things or changing.

4.1.2 Clarity of Career Development

Nearly 80% of Gen Y stated that they knew exactly what their career development goals are. They perfectly understood the power and resources they possessed. Nearly half of the students who are in workplace showed that they knew exactly how to achieve their goals.

4.1.3 People Who Will Affect Gen Y’s Decision of Career Choice

Gen Y will value the suggestions from family and self. They will also take friends’ suggestions into consideration. This shows that Gen Y are traditional to a certain degree. Sometimes, suggestions from family and friends tend to be emotional. the society should provide Gen Y with professional consulting and coaching on their career related problems.

4.1.4 Nature of Enterprise Gen Y’s Preferred

¹⁰ Hartmann, E., Feisel, E. & Schober, H., 2010, Talent management of western MNCs in China: Balancing global integration and local responsiveness, *Journal of World Business*, 45, 170.

Students chose foreign companies the most. Compared with two years ago, the attractiveness of government and SOEs is declining. Compared with students' ideal employer, the actual employers for alumni are quite equally spreading among Foreign Invested, SOEs, and Private Chinese.

4.2 Employability

4.2.1 Employers Value Most When Hiring

The opinions about what employers would value most when hiring from Gen Y and HRs: Both 90s and employers agreed “commitment” and “embrace corporate value” are important for interviewees. HRs and Gen Y almost had the same opinion on which qualities were valued most by employers.

4.2.2 The Key Skills Developed Through Enactus Match with the Skills that Employers Seek for from Potential Talents

Enactus enables students to develop these skills: “teamwork”, “creative”, “problem-solving” and “communication skills”, which were highly valued by employers as well. That also approves that Enactus program improves Gen Y's employability and future career success as skill development. Enactus gave students the most competitive experience in the workplace.

4.3 Talent Attraction and Retention

4.3.1 Motivation

Gen Y chose “compensation and benefits” the first, and then followed by “promotion and training”, “harmonious team environment”, and “job with fun and challenges”. Even students were facing a hard time in finding a job, they did not lower their expectation on salary.

4.3.2 Favorite Corporate Culture

More than 70% Gen Y chose “harmonious atmosphere, accountable peers and collaborative team” as their favorite corporate culture. They are looking forward to establishing classmates or peer to peer team relationship. They'd like to be part of a team. And nearly 40% Gen Y chose “sustained creativity” for favorite corporate culture, showing that Gen Y feel more comfortable in a more creative working environment. Stable work has gradually lost attractiveness to young men because the passion will be easily drained away without creativity.

4.3.3 *Ultimate Career Goal*

Gen Y ranked “financial freedom” No.1 as ultimate career goal. Almost at the same level of choice as entrepreneurs is to become expert in one particular professional field. Except as “entrepreneurs” and “professional expert”, Gen Y chose “leaders”, “middle or high-level managers” and “stable income and work” quite equally.

Nearly 30% Gen Y chose to become an entrepreneur as ultimate career goal. This is a way to realize self-value. People who had working experience would like to prove their value in a way which is within their control.

4.3.4 *The Boss that Gen Y Prefer to Work with*

More than half of Gen Y appreciated these two qualities: Influential and passionate, prospective and have a vision. On the contrary, Gen Y did not have a very specific requirement on “assertive”, “strong empathy”, “result-oriented”. They show great tolerance and are willing to work together for a better future. In the internet age, the boss who is a good storyteller and passionate about life will be more attractive to young men. Gen Y will prefer leadership to authorities. They had a very high standard on bosses’ professional skills which further proved that Gen Y desired to learn the new knowledge and skills. They also believed that the leaders should be a role model.

4.3.5 *Communication Way at Work*

Gen Y hope the communication style is well-organized, straight forward and result-oriented. It will enable them to understand the plan or reach the outcome. Gen Y wish they can be treated in a fair when communicate with others. During communication, it needs to show the planning and organizing of the conversation. Gen Y did not like “casualness”.

4.3.6 *The Effective Way to Manage Gen Y*

More than 50% Gen Y chose “give regular feedback and coaching” and “create relaxed atmosphere of team” as effective ways of management. More than 40% Gen Y chose “allow more freedom” and “recognize my contribution to the team”.

5 Conclusions

Based on the previous findings, we found that employers do not exactly understand Gen Y while Gen Y may look at things superficially.

5.1 *Give more freedom to Gen Y and trust them when carry out tasks.*

At the beginning of research findings, we found that more than half of employers used “strong personality” and “free spirit” to describe Gen Y while only 10% of Gen Y thought that they

have strong personalities. “Free spirit” was selected by some university students while Gen Y in workplace didn’t mention this word. That means when Gen Y enter the workplace, they will become mature. Gen Y used “strong responsibility” and “adaptable” to describe themselves but employer did not choose these two words. Employers could be influenced by some researches and thought that Gen Y are not responsible than the previous generation with prejudice.

5.2 Create a new working environment for the working main force- Gen Y.

Based on the previous research, we found that Gen Y preferred a working environment as school is. Most of Gen Y spend more than 15 years at school. They want to establish classmates or peer to peer team relationship with their colleagues, while get along with a boss who is more like the teacher and will give them some guidance when doing tasks. Gen Y indicated their preference for a boss who is influential and passionate, prospective and have a vision, at the same time talks to them in an organized and humorous way. One of the five behavioral attributes that a charismatic leader has also contain these characteristics (Conger & Kanungo, 1998)¹¹.

5.3 Provide professional career planning guidance for Gen Y.

Gen Y thought they are accountable but employers didn’t think so. It’s a huge difference. According to the data from multiple recruitment sites, the turnover rate of the new generation employees in China is more than 60%. Among them, nearly 30% of the staff quit frequently in a year with more than 5 times. (Yang R.F, 2016)¹². The survey data gives the answer why employers did not agree that Gen Y were accountable. Gen Y hope to find their ideal jobs. They want to do exact what they want to do. When the working environment is not expected, they will choose to go to another companies.

A slightly higher level of mismatch between Gen Y and employers is found in this research. Further research should be done to clarify some related questions like the achievement of employability skills and knowledge by universities. Gen Y face a more competitive world as the number of undergraduates increase with fewer jobs available. They should prepare themselves for the changing and competitive world.

¹¹ Jay A. Conger, Rabindra N. Kanungo, “Charismatic leadership in organizations”, Sage Publications, 1998.

¹² Yang, R.F. (2016), “Research on Tendency and Behavior of the New Generation Employees Turnover”, Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies, 4, 325-336.

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