



Who is our Generation Y?

Survey on characteristics and preferences of Generation Y in the Workplace



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Continuing
Professional
Development
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持續專業進修聯盟

With the escalating number of Generation Y entering the labor force, the business sector has an emergent concern about working with Generation Y. Generation Y are the people who born between 1981-1994, who are today aged approximately 17 to 30. The Continuing Professional Development Alliance (CPD Alliance) awarded Tamty McGill Consultants International Limited, with the help of students from various universities of Hong Kong have recently conducted a survey about generation Y in order to help employers to understand the characteristics and preferences of generation Y in the workplace in order to develop appropriate strategies and tactics to work effectively with them. With better understanding of the Generation Y's characteristics and preferences it may be possible to best leverage their talents for future business development.

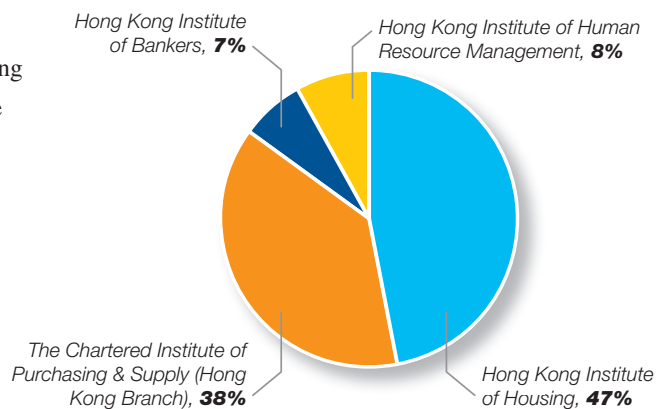


A total of 488 questionnaires were collected for analysis. As shown in **Table 1**, the respondents included 165 employers, 138 working Gen-Y respondents, as well as 19 non-working gen Y degree holders and 166 non-working gen Y non-degree holders,

Table 1. Respondents' demographics

Classification of Respondents	Number of respondents	Percentage
Employers	165	34%
Working Generation Y	138	28%
Non-working Generation Y (degree holder)	19	4%
Non-working Generation Y (Non-degree holder)	166	34%
Total	488	100%

The respondents are from 4 institutes: The Hong Kong Institute of Housing, The Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply (Hong Kong Branch), the Hong Kong Institute of Bankers and the Hong Kong Institute of Human Resource Management, according to the distribution shown in **Graph 1**.



Graph 1. Respondents' demographics

According to **Table 2**, 65.5% of employers among the respondents belong to Generation X, whereas only 12.1% of employers belong to Generation Y.

Table 2. Employers' age group

Employers' age group	Number of respondents	Percentage
Silent Generation (born in 1922-1945)	1	0.6%
Baby Boomer (born in 1946-1964)	36	21.8%
Generation X (born in 1964-1980)	108	65.5%
Generation Y (born in 1981-1994)	20	12.1%
Total	165	100%

As shown in **Table 3**, at the moment the majority of the responding employers' departments have less than 5 Generation Y employees.

Table 3. Number of Generation Y staff in employers' department

Number of Generation Y employees	Number of respondents	Percentage
Less than 5	92	56%
5-10	39	23%
11-15	15	9%
More than 15	19	12%
Total	165	100%

Major findings of the survey

What are the attributes that Generation Y would look for when they choose/choose to stay in a job?

Among the attributes related to choosing or staying in a job, monetary compensation and benefits was ranked most often by the Generation Y respondents as the most significant attribute. This is also the attribute that the employers reckoned to be the most important in attracting Generation Y. In spite of this significant attribute, there is a great discrepancy between the preference of various employment attributes between Generation Y who are currently working and those out of a job. The non-working generation highly values their own interests and the level of fun at the job when they are looking for a job in the near future. Yet, those who are working at present regard a clear and achievable career pathway as more important than the nature of the job. Table 4 shows the top 6 rankings of the respondents as they ranked the attributes.

Table 4. Comparison of ranking of working attributes

Ranking	Employers	Working Gen-Y	Non-working Gen-Y (Degree holder)	Non-working Gen-Y (Non-degree holder)
1 st	Monetary compensation and benefits	Monetary compensation and benefits	Monetary compensation and benefits	Monetary compensation and benefits
2 nd	Clear and achievable career pathway	Clear and achievable career pathway	Interests and Fun	Interests and Fun
3 rd	Interests and fun	Job security	Professional advancement	Professional advancement
4 th	Professional advancement	Professional advancement	Flexible timetable	Clear and achievable career pathway
5 th	Flexible timetable	Interests and fun	Clear and achievable career pathway	Job security
6 th	Job security	Flexible timetable	Job security	Flexible timetable

Which kind of mentor approach styles does Generation Y prefers?

The survey revealed that working and non-working Generation Y respondents preferred different mentoring styles at work. Although the results demonstrated that 44% of employers supposed a collaborative mentor who provides freedom in work would appeal to Generation Y, in fact the

Generation Y response did not support this assumption. The majority of Generation Y respondents revealed that they preferred supportive mentors who offer them help when they need it, according to the situation. As for the non-working Generation Y who are studying for a degree or higher qualification, 42% of them preferred a mentor with a directive approach that give them clear rules and instructions. This mismatch of mentor approach preferences might lead to inefficient mentorship on the ground. The comparison between the different respondents' opinions on the style of mentoring which Generation Y would prefer is shown in **Table 5** (in percentage).



Table 5. Comparison of the respondents' opinions on the mentoring style Generation Y would prefer

	Employers	Working Gen-Y	Non-working Gen-Y (Degree holder)	Non-working Gen-Y (Non-degree holder)
Directive mentor	21%	14%	42%	20%
Supportive mentor	26%	48%	26%	48%
Collaborative mentor	44%	27%	21%	23%
Achievement-oriented mentor	9%	11%	11%	9%

What are the characteristics of Generation Y in the workplace?

Table 6 shows the average scores of several characteristics of Generation Y in the workplace, as rated by the respondents. The higher the average score, the more respondents believe that Generation Y noticeably exhibits that particular characteristic at work. Results clearly demonstrated that employers thought that Generation Y employees would like to choose their working hours flexibly. As for the working Generation Y respondents, they disclosed that they like to participate in decision-making at work.

Table 6. Mean scores of characteristics rated by respondents

Characteristics	Employers	Working Gen-Y	Non-working Gen-Y (Degree holder)	Non-working Gen-Y (Non-degree holder)
They want to participate in decisions made related to their work	3.89	4.37	4.32	4.03
They are more adaptable to different working environments	3.21	4.31	4.16	3.85
They want to have more instant response when communicating with others	4.14	4.30	4.47	4.45
They want to choose their working hours flexibly	4.49	3.92	4.79	4.37

Table 7 shows the top 5 adjectives that respondents used to describe Generation Y in the workplace. “Creative” and “energetic” are two of the adjectives that respondents thought most fitting to describe people of Generation Y.

Table 7. Top 5 adjectives that respondents used to describe Generation Y at workplace

Ranking	Employers	Working Gen-Y	Non-working Gen-Y (Degree holder)	Non-working Gen-Y (Non-degree holder)
1 st	Self-centered	Creative	Creative	Creative
2 nd	Impatient	Energetic	Self-complacent	Lazy
3 rd	Creative	Self-centered	Lazy	Freedom
4 th	Lazy	Hardworking	Hardworking	Money
5 th	Irresponsible	Enjoy freedom	Energetic	Energetic

What kind of rewards can motivate Generation in the workplace?

As shown in **Table 8**, most of the respondents, including employers, working Generation Y and non-working Generation Y degree holders believe that money and title recognition best motivates Generation Y. All of them consider that, among the choices given, giving more meaningful work to Generation Y motivates them least.

Table 8. Comparison of respondents' views on rewards that could motivate Generation Y in the workplace

Rewards	Employers	Working Gen-Y	Non-working Gen-Y (Degree holder)	Non-working Gen-Y (Non-degree holder)
Satisfactory performance in their job	29%	40%	37%	39%
Freedom at work execution	23%	12%	14%	14%
Money and title recognition	44%	43%	39%	38%
More meaningful work given	4%	5%	10%	9%

Highlights of the survey

Over all, the findings suggested that both employers and Generation Y think that Generation Y are creative. However, employers noted that Generation Y are quite impatient, self-centered and irresponsible, while Generation Y consider themselves to be hardworking and energetic.

Generation Y always seek more ownership of their job, and they would like to participate in the decision making process. As they are at the start of their career, they would like more support and guidelines from employers at workplace. Beyond money and title recognition; job satisfaction, learning opportunities and exposure from work are also effective ways to motivate them.

Advice for working effectively with Generation Y

1. *Informal communication*

As Generation Y desires democracy and fun in the workplace, employers may avoid “parental style” speeches. Certainly rules and instructions have to be communicated seriously and effectively, but casual chats with a good-humored approach are usually more appropriate when communicating with Generation Y. They prefer instant responses and feedback. Luncheons and informal gatherings can be held to communicate and listen to their views too.

2. *Develop career goals*

Generation Y are at the beginning of their career and are always seeking for personal development. Employers may help them better define their career goals, from which process both employers and employees may benefit.

3. *Enhance exposure and experience*

Different kinds of training and international exposure to various kinds of duties can attract and retain Generation Y employees.

4. *Facilitate mentoring*

Since Generation Y employees are at the beginning of their working life, they always prefer more help and guidance from employers. They would always like a coach to provide a helping hand to them and provide continuous feedback in the workplace.

5. *Provide immediate positive reinforcements*

Generation Y always appreciates encouragements from employers and they especially prefer instant feedback. When Generation Y employees perform well, employers may try to provide immediate positive reinforcement to them, which could be verbal encouragement. A simple “well done” could be very encouraging to Generation Y employees.

6. *Avoid stereotyping*

Employers should be careful not to label all people of Generation Y as exactly the same, as everyone within all generational groups may have very different characteristics and preferences.

CPD Alliance was founded on April 2002. It is an informal group of professional society that includes 20 corporate members in Hong Kong. The prominent professional members include: CPA Australia – Greater China Division, the Hong Kong Bar Association, the Hong Kong Computer Society, The Hong Kong Institute of Arbitrators, the Hong Kong Institute of Bankers, the Hong Kong Institute of Human Resource Management, the Hong Kong Institute of Marketing, the Hong Kong International Arbitration Centre, the Hong Kong Securities Institute, the Institute of Financial Accountants in Hong Kong, The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, The Hong Kong Institute of Chartered Secretaries, The Hong Kong Institute of Directors, The Law Society of Hong Kong, The Taxation Institute of Hong Kong, The Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply (Hong Kong Branch), The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (Hong Kong Branch), The Hong Kong Institute of Housing, the Project Management Institute Hong Kong Chapter and the Hong Kong Institute of Utility Specialists. The Alliance aims at promoting and enhancing the competence and skills of professional practitioners through continuing professional development.

