



Generation-Y Employees and Their Perceptions of Work-Life Balance

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to identify the perceptions of Generation Y employees regarding work-life balance practices. As increasing numbers of Generation Y enter the workforce, questions regarding how they perceive work, family and self-related issues, challenges and coping strategies in balancing personal and professional commitments became issues of interests for employers. This study uses interviews to collect data from six informants in Generation Y and the data were analyzed through content analysis. The results indicate that Generation Y employees do indeed have issues and challenges with balancing work and family. However, unlike the older generation of employees, Generation Y employees perceive managing work-life balance only through segmentation or separation strategies. This particular finding indicates that if organizations want to attract and retain these employees they should adapt a strategy specifically designed to target this employee group.

Keywords: Gen Y; work-life balance; issues and challenges; coping strategies; segmentation

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INTRODUCTION

Adaptability is a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual's resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks, transitions, traumas in their occupational roles that,

to some degree large or small, alter their social integration (Savickas, 1997). In this environment where change is constant, the external and internal demands on an individual to adapt become critical to success. Adaptability as a competency can be manifested into differing strategies such as the Work-Life Balance (WLB) concept or practices usually applied in today's organizations to attain cohesion between work and life domains. As such, WLB can be described as the individual's perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and hence promote growth in accordance with an individual's

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current life priorities. WLB has become the buzz word globally even in Asia although this practice is still novel to some. Work-life balance is one of the most important issues nowadays, employer and employee are expected to manage and efforts are to be made to address work life balance issues to increase their competitiveness and morale of the employees. Work related issues relate directly to the workplace of employees where they perform hectic and rigid schedules, and often there is job dissatisfaction leading to personal problems, such as time management, rigid work schedule and Remote Office (Nayak & Pandey, 2014).

WLB has been named the most important factor for job satisfaction by working professionals in the Asia Pacific, according to the Microsoft Asia 2 New World of Work Survey (Lee, 2016). This shows that Asian countries are starting to expect WLB to significantly increase the performance of their employees. A recent New World of Work (NWoW) study indicated that 82 percent of Malaysian respondents valued work-life balance as an important element of their jobs (Vijandren, 2016). An innovative generation of employees is starting to enter the workforce carrying with them new expectations. This Generation Y had begun a commotion in the workplace as employers scramble to find out as much information as possible about them. This is one way to attract and retain Generation Y employees at the workplace. Research by Willis Towers Watson found that 69 percent of Gen Y list work-life balance as their next biggest worry or their priority (Tovey, 2016). Hence with this scenario in mind, this research focuses on Malaysian Generation Y employees and their

perceptions about work-life balance practices.

Many previous types of research explained about work-life balance practices generally among the employees in the organization. A quantitative study by Murthy and Shastri (2015) explored the work-life balance among employees working in private sector in India. The results say that many employees sacrificed their personal time in order to get the balance between work and life. The women employees especially have a lot of conflicts shifting roles between being mothers and fulfilling other family roles. The study found that employee find a strategy to adjust themselves in order to fulfill the commitment both work and non-work. A study conducted by Hashmi, Pharm, Malik, and Hussain (2016) regarding work-life balance among pharmacist in Pakistan, aims to explore the impact of work-life balance on job satisfaction. It was revealed that salary, relationship with co-workers, promotion, job security and work environment had a significant impact on job satisfaction. It was concluded that work life balance is not simply essential for the health and well-being of individuals, but is also cost-efficient for institutions and improves work-environments. A prior study in Malaysia conducted by Samuel and Ramayah (2016) shows a positive result in examining the relationship between employability, mobility and work-life balance among MBA graduates. The findings showed that a positive relationship was found between employability and mobility and this relationship was stronger when the work-life balance was higher.

The researcher indicates that organizations should realize the high importance placed by

individuals on work-life balance and would need to draw up policies and procedures to enhance this balance among the employees, including changing their inflexible corporate policies to allow for more adaptability and flexibility.

Another study was conducted throughout six countries namely Polish, Austria, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, and Russia by Januszkiewicz (2014), aiming to discover the perceptions of work-life balance and the cost of it. For this study, questionnaires were randomly distributed among representatives of Generation Y students from the six countries. The findings show that Generation Y was aware of the dangers that professional life could contaminate their family life later on.

The study also found out that Generation Y perceived that their private life should be given equal attention as their professional life. Prior studies showed that scholars somehow were only interested in studying only about Generation Z and their perceptions about work. However, notably, Generation Z is not yet entering the workforce so the past research based on this sample is not fully recognized as it just shows their expectations towards work force. The research shows that Generation Z prefers workplace flexibility such as work-life balance and career-oriented (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015).

We can view that Generation Z which is much later than Generation Y employees are looking forward to work-life balance. Another scholar that studied about Generation Z also presented that Generation Z needs a constant future career as well as ideal workplace and career aspirations. This shows that Generation Z is truly looking forward to what

their workplace will offer to them especially the work and life domain (Iorgulescu, 2016). Through this, we know that Generation Z which is much later than Generation Y are truly looking forward to what their workplace can offer to them. Based on these past studies, few gaps have been identified. The first gap is the empirical gap. These past findings were also conducted in other countries such as India (Murthy & Shastri, 2015), Turkey (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015) and Romania (Iorgulescu, 2016). Most of the previous research on the perception of work-life balance was conducted on other generations such as Generation Z by Ozkan and Solmaz (2015) which is much later than Generation Y. Notably, limited research has been done on Generation Y employees regarding their perceptions on work-life balance. Consequently, there is a need to carry out this study locally and do the research among the Generation Y employees as limited past research has been done on this generation of employees. Another gap that was also identified is the methodological gap. Most of the past research employed quantitative studies such as Ozkan and Solmaz (2015), Iorgulescu (2016) and Januszkiewicz (2014). Hence, this study will be carried out through qualitative study to find more in depth about the perceptions of Generation Y employees regarding the work-life balance practices.

METHODS

A research design is basically a master plan that provides an essential framework for the researchers to answer the research question or test the research hypothesis, and ensure that the data collected are in consistent with the research objective (Polit and Beck, 2008;

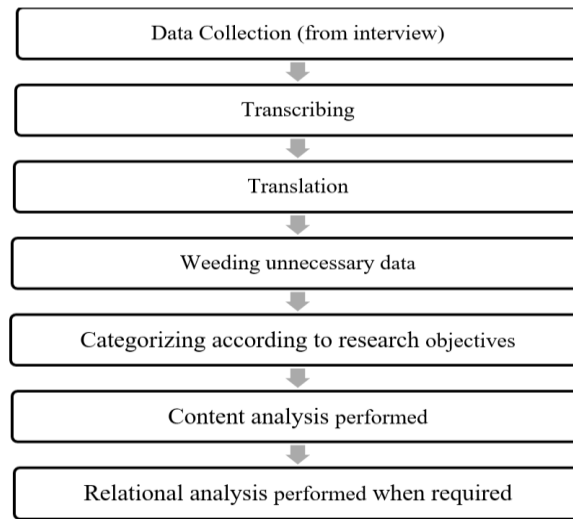


Figure1: Framework of Data Analysis (Source: Ahmad et. al., 2014)

Kinnear and Taylor, 1996). Thus, it ensures that the findings generated from the collected data would be able to answer the research question confidently and convincingly (de Vaus, 2001). In another words, a research design can be seen as the actualization of logic in a set of procedures that optimize the validity of the data for a given research problem. Generally, there are two types of research methodology that consist of qualitative research method and quantitative research method. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this particular study, a qualitative research method was employed. In terms of data collection method, pilot interviews were conducted before the actual study. Three employees participated in this exercise, and amendments were made based on their

feedback. Six employees from the public and private organizations were involved in the actual study. Besides, important data of this study was also obtained through the library research. Figure 1 illustrates the framework of the data analysis of this study.

Interviews were conducted in the Malay language. Data were transcribed verbatim by the researchers and analyzed using a content analysis approach. In this study, the researchers were holding translator status. By holding this status, it assists researchers to talk about a point in the text with their true meaning (Temple & Young, 2004).

Demographic Characteristics of Informants and Sampling Procedure

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Informants

Informants	Demographic Characteristics
Generation Y Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male and female employees • Age between 22-36 years old • Currently work either in public or private sector • Single and married • Year of working service between 2.5–13 years

To ensure that the data collected were in consistent with the research objectives, thus the informants of this study were chosen carefully through a purposive sampling method among Generation Y working in the public and private organizations throughout Bintulu, Sarawak. Purposive sampling allows the researchers to gather important data from specific groups (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). In terms of age, Generation Y was born between 1980 up to 1994. This means they are between the age of 22 to 36 years old. Table 1 illustrated in detail the information of informants' demographic profile.

Research Instrument

A semi-structured in-depth interview was employed to obtain important information from the informants of the study. By choosing semi-structured interview, the researcher had the flexibility to ask additional important questions that were not originally included in the interview guide. This method resulted in obtaining unexpected and insightful information that was very crucial in refining and strengthens the findings. An in-depth interview or intensive interview utilizes individuals who have unique and important

knowledge as the starting point for the qualitative research process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). In overall 12 main questions were asked during the interview sessions. In addition to these 12 questions, another few additional open-ended questions were also being asked to the informants in order to have richer information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Objective 1: To find out the work and family related issues and challenges faced by the Gen Y employee.

The work related issues and challenges discuss all the issues and challenges faced by the Gen Y employee related to their job and work place, work environment as well as their colleagues. The response by the informants, related to their work was further divided into issues and challenges based on similar issues and challenges raised by the majority of the informants interviewed. On being asked questions on issues and challenges related to work and job, two of the informants had different complaints relating to workload. This issue throws light on a strict guideline needed to be followed by the informant as well as the

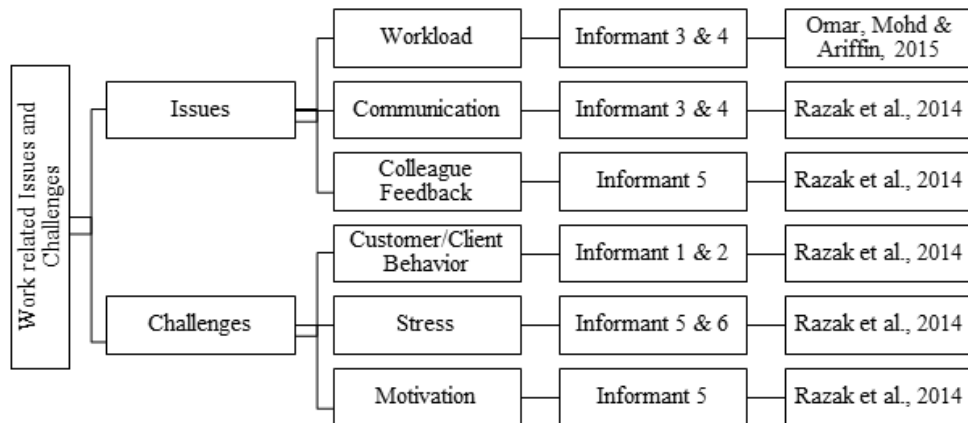


Figure 2: Work Related Issues and Challenges Faced by Gen Y Employee

sudden workload that clashes with what the informant had planned before-hand. Some of the responses given by the informants are:

"...done follow the rule specification and standard that had been set in educating and teaching the children... ensure the quality of work, time management, and safety always taken care and follows the plan." – Informant 4

"Time and things that out of our control...clash with what I had planned before-hand." – Informant 3

Omar, Mohd, and Ariffin (2015) claimed that workload is stronger in negatively predicting work-life balance among employees. This further suggests that the employers need to be aware of workload segregation, hence taking action to avoid increment of workload among employees. Even though past researchers mentioned that workload increment decreased employee's work-life balance, it is not in this current study as the informants did not mention that the workload has a significant impact on their work-life balance. This might be because the workload is done during the work hours only. On being asked about the communication and the informant colleague feedback in the workplace, some of the informants said the communication was difficult, and there was negative feedback from their colleagues. As an illustration, the issues for communication is that the informant did have trouble to communicate with some of their colleagues, and the informant mentioned that she had negative feedback from her colleague which was more to personal matters. Some of the informant responses were:

"Comfortable but not all of them...depending of the individual." – Informant 3

"Sometimes negative feedback. Less cooperation, mostly it includes personal matters." – Informant 5

According to Razak et al. (2014), the interpersonal relationship at work constitutes day to day interaction between co-workers, managers, and employees. These relations are a natural part of the work environment and usually, give pleasure to the employees as they can communicate with each other when facing the problem. But unfortunately, this relation also may become a source of tension and frustration to the employees when they have a different opinion on how to manage the job that has been given to them. These support the informants' responses on their communication issues as well as their colleague feedback which were slightly negative. However, it was not mentioned that these issues have a great impact towards their work-life balance in overall. Regardless that, these issues shouldn't be ignored as it might give a greater effect on the employee's work-life balance in any way. On being asked about the challenges faced by Gen Y employee, they shared that they faced challenges such as customer or client behavior, stress, and even motivation. The informant mentioned that they faced the customer or client behavior during weekdays which was a real challenge for them. Other informant mentioned that they feel stress at work due to some problems but they solve it at the workplace instantly. One informant particularly mentioned about motivation at the workplace which is hard to maintain. Some of the responses are:

“Facing those stubborn and inconsiderate customers.” – Informant 1

“Facing the behavior of the orphan since they are so dynamic and active.” – Informant 2

“The challenges would be the environment, peer pressure...” – Informant 5

“The main challenge would be stress over the problem at work which is common...” – Informant 6

“...maintain high self-motivation in performing well.” – Informant 4

Razak, Yusof, Asidin, Latif, and Ismail (2014), mentioned that stress is a common issue that always happens in every organization where the employee cannot run away from facing work stress in their work. As this also interrelated to the demand of the work whereby the employee also needs to entertain their clients or customers as well as satisfy the customer needs. This supports the current findings that the Gen Y employee has to face

the client behavior as well as having stress at work. Regardless to that, it was not mentioned that these challenges have an impact towards their work-life balance. Razak et al. (2014), also mentioned that relationship among the employees is important in order to encourage and sustain the harmonious environment in the workplace as this will ensure that high motivation is present in the workplace. It can be viewed that workplace environment plays an important role in maintaining motivation as well as produce low-stress level for the employee.

The family related issues and challenges discuss all the issues and challenges faced by the Gen Y employee related to a family, which are issues and challenges related to their roles as a spouse, a mother and others role in the family like son or daughter. Spending quality time with spouse is very important. In this study, husband and wife have difficulties to meet up each other due to high work commitment and different work scheduling.

Some of the responses are:

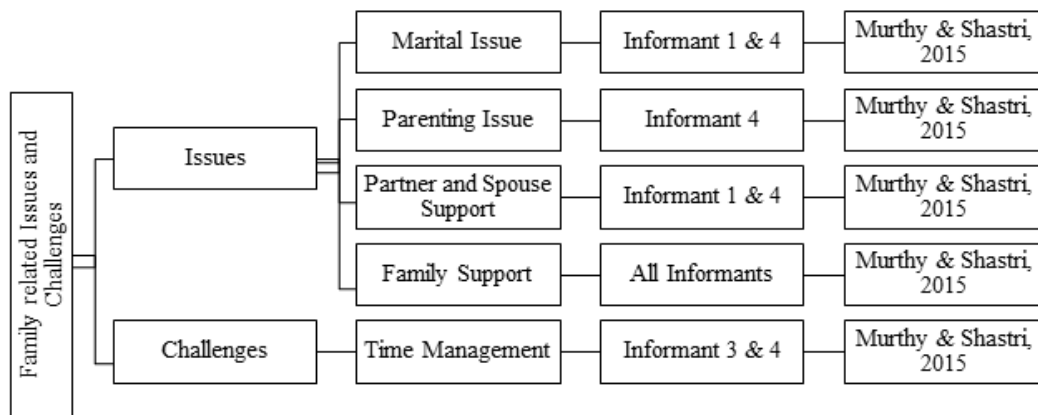


Figure 3: Family Related Issues and Challenges Faced by Gen Y Employee

Sometimes it does affect me if my spouse has to work over time during the weekend or holiday.” – Informant 1

“It does affect me since we have different off day or rest day that limits our time to be together.” -Informant 4

Murthy and Shastri (2015), found that this issue has been a challenge to those married individuals whereby the married have little time to spend with the spouse as their spouses have a lot of travelling jobs or overlapping schedules which they hardly have time together. However, in these findings, the married Gen Y informants mentioned that they still have time to spend with their spouse even though their plans for a date out need to be canceled at that certain time due to duties of their spouse. This shows that the informant views quality time with a love one is important. One married informant with a child mentioned that she had done some activities with her son, however she mentioned that she wanted more time with her son to prepare him with a proper education as well prepare him with proper religious knowledges. Murthy and Shastri (2015), mentioned that the employees carry the emotions, attitudes, skills, and behaviors that begin at their work to their homes and vice versa. Regardless of that, the current findings show that the Gen Y informant is preferring to spend quality time with their children and families. The issue on partner and spouse partner relating to challenges they face as spouse or partners in maintain their work-life balance. The informants mentioned that they had good support from their spouse or partner, which motivated them to be more proactive in maintaining work-life balance. This shows that the issues regarding this matter are positive

for this research. Some of the positive responses are:

“Taking a short vacation or having meal outside or at the restaurant” – Informant 1

“Together we do housework, exercising, hang out or even window shopping.” – Informant 4

Other findings by Murthy and Shastri (2015), mentioned that little time spent with the spouse or partner create dissatisfaction in work-life balance. However, the current finding which is positive that even lesser time or some plan had to be canceled out due to overlapping schedule, the Gen Y informants mentioned that whenever they had a time they will ensure that they will do some activities together. It can be considered that it’s not the quantity of time spent but the quality of time they had with each other. The issue on family support relates to challenges they face as they play their role as son or daughter in the family in maintaining their work-life balance. All the informants mentioned that they had no problem in spending time with their family member as this shows that it is positive that they had a good relationship with their family members. Some of the responses are:

“...having a walk with family, an outing with co-workers and etc. Sometimes, I spend my free time with the orphan even though it was not my shift.” – Informant 2

“...weekend with activities especially for family and personal activities.” – Informant 4

Based on a family support issue, other findings by Murthy and Shastri (2015),

mentioned that the employees are not able to give time to their family as well as play their role as daughter, son or parent to their children. It is important to realize that, the current findings mentioned that Gen Y informants were having a good relationship with their family while spending their free time with their own family. It can be seen that the family support is positive within the Gen Y employee family domain. However, some of the informants mentioned that they faced a challenge which is time management. They mentioned that they had troubled in managing time especially between work and family matters as this affect their engagement with their family. This is due to their workload that sometimes needs to be finished on time. The informant also wishes to have more time to spend with their family members. Some of the responses are:

“...loosen the family engagement since less time is spent with the family.” – Informant 3

“Need more time for my family. Hoping that I’m given time to rest during the weekend and be with my family.” – Informant 4

Murthy and Shastry (2015), also mentioned in their findings that poor time management has affected the employee quality time with their family. This support the current findings that the Gen Y informant had some difficulties in spending time with their family whenever their work demands them to work extra time especially during the weekend. This is the biggest challenge as they want some time to spend with their loved ones, especially during the free time. It can be seen that this may affect their work-life balance in a way because of extra workload demand, especially during the weekend, may cause

stress or dissatisfaction in having quality time with the family.

Objective 2: To Get an Insight How Gen Y Cope with Managing the Balance between Work and Personal Commitments

The evidence from the interviews suggests that the Generation Y employees use coping mechanisms in managing the balance between work and personal commitment. Lazarus (1998, p. 201) defines coping as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person”. Coping mechanisms can be divided into two - positive and negative coping mechanisms. This study revealed that the informants used the positive coping mechanism as described below. The strategy discusses what methods and techniques the informants have inculcated in maintaining the balance between their professional and personal commitment. The responses were divided into the same strategy based on similar response raised by the majority of the informants. One of the strategies being used by the Gen Y employees was distinct work and family matters. The informants mentioned that they clearly distinguish work and family matter without interference from each of it. Some of the responses are:

“...doing job task in workplace accordingly as well as... spending time with family and my husband and family during weekend and holiday.” – Informant 1

“...really distinct the time for work is just for work while free time will be with my family, friends and me.” – Informant 2

“...I clearly divide my professional and personal activities...I tried not to bring a problem from the workplace to home and vice versa. What more can I say work is work, life is life.” – Informant 6

prioritize what needs to be done first. Some of the responses are:

“...do not bother about petty things that unimportant. Prioritize what is more important.” – Informant 3

These findings are supported by the segmentation model whereby the work and life are separate domains that do not influence each other or the separation of work and life, such that the two roles do not influence each other (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). This shows that Gen Y employees view work-life balance as two separate domains without any interference. It can be seen that Gen Y informant does not want to interfere their work and life as it may produce conflict to them. Another strategy is planning, scheduling and organizing better. The informants mentioned that by planning, scheduling, and organizing better there wouldn't be any problem faced either in work or life matters. They particularly mentioned that they didn't bother about petty things or unimportant things rather they

“...discipline me in dividing time daily for my own comfort.” – Informant 5

Hsieh and Eggers (2010), mentioned in their studies that the conflict of employee between work and personal lives which were unavoidable was tackled aggressively by planning, scheduling, and organizing to increase efficiency in performing their roles as to maintain an effective balance between their work and non-work domains. This supports the findings that Gen Y employees cope their balance management by planning, scheduling and organizing better in both personal and professional commitment to avoid any conflicts. Planning, organizing and scheduling better can ensure no conflict is present which may hinder work-life balance. In this

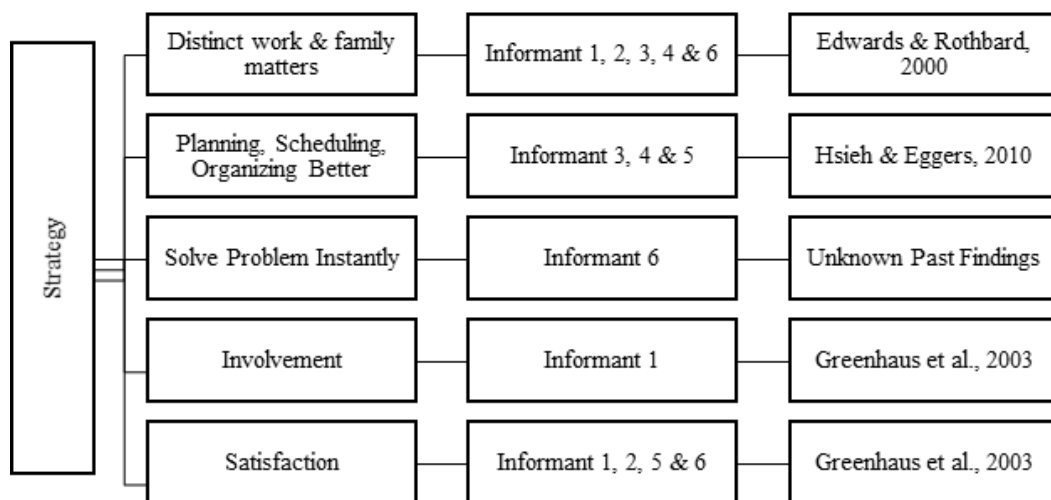


Figure 4: Strategy used by Gen Y Employee with Managing the Balance between Work and Personal Commitments

study, it is also interesting to know that solving problems instantly was suggested by the informant for coping strategies. One informant mentioned in order to have a balance between work and personal matters, we need to solve our problems instantly either in workplace or home. Solving the problem instantly will ease our life as it will not become a long term thought for us. Throughout this study, the researcher unable to find any past findings similar to this finding. The response is:

“...not much problem and the problem is still can be solved even if it difficult I’ll try to find other alternatives to solve it. When I faced problem at workplace I solve it there, when I have problem at home or conflict in family I’ll solve it there...” – Informant 6

Another informant mentioned that involvement is the strategy that can be used to cope with managing the balance between professional and personal matters. She mentioned that involvement with family members is a way to manage the balance which is the satisfaction of spending time with the family. Her response is:

“...time spent with family and husband is good enough...since can spend time with them during weekend and holiday. Moreover, the employee is also given ample holiday leave to spend with the family.” – Informant 1

Greenhaus et al. (2003), mentioned in their findings that individuals who invested substantially more time and involved in family more than work experienced the least conflict as these individuals decided not to let their work responsibilities interfere with their family life. This supports the current findings

that Gen Y employee involvement with their family is good enough for them to interact with their own family. Family engagement can increase positivity in work and life as support is given by the family members. Other informants also mentioned about satisfaction. Satisfaction whereby they feel satisfied in what they do either in professional or personal matters. They are satisfied with whatever they did in maintaining the balance between professional and personal matters. Some of the responses are:

“Very satisfied. There is no specific strategy...” – Informant 1

“Satisfied enough. No particular strategy.” – Informant 2

“I’m totally satisfied since there is not much problem...” – Informant 6

Greenhaus et al. (2003), mentioned in their findings that imbalanced satisfaction favoring the family was associated with a high quality of life among those individuals who derived substantial satisfaction from their combined roles. This supports the findings that Gen Y employees are satisfied in what they do either in family or work domain ensuring that they have a better work life balance. However, despite saying they are satisfied, they also mentioned that they want more of it but they did not mention anything related to it. This could be due to social desirability which is their ego, denial or their lifestyle.

CONCLUSIONS

Generally, this research is about the perception of Gen Y towards work-life balance

practices. Therefore, it would be a good foundation for the organization, to utilize this research as part of their plan to attract and retain talent from Generation Y who is increasingly entering the workforce. This is due to the fact that, Gen Y employees have varied opinions regarding their satisfaction towards the work-life balance. Thus, the line of employers in charge of management could plan and implement family-friendly work-life balance policies that benefit across generations in the organization to both genders and workers' family. Not to mention, this is also part of talent management which may attract and retain talent especially from Gen Y. It must be remembered, if the organization takes care of its employees' family first, the employees will reciprocate the favors back with commitment, hard work, and contribution towards the organization. Equally important, this research also provides such impacts towards human resource practitioners. Human resource practitioners play a major role in developing and implementing a good work-life balance policy. Indirectly, this research conveys additional information that can be related to talent retention of Gen Y employees. As a consequence, in order to attract and retain talent from Gen Y, the human resource practitioners ought to provide work-life balance practices or policies as a business strategy to attract and retain talent especially Gen Y. Besides, it may be useful to attract the later generation employee who might be entering the workforce later on. Surprisingly, customers are also attracted to an organization that has great family values. This is due to the fact that family-friendly values may be portrayed through the actions of the employees which enable customers to feel satisfied when dealing with the organization. Future researchers could extend this research

through raising the sampling amount of informants in order to gather richer data. Coupled with that, the future researcher may utilize different methodology which is a quantitative or mixed method to gather more data as well as to be able to view an overall view of Gen Y perception towards work-life balance practices. In the light of that, the future researcher may explore Gen Y employee perception from specific occupation, public or private sector or even based on educational background and marital status. In addition, the future researcher may investigate Gen Y from the different regions, for instance, comparing the perception of Gen Y employee from small metropolitan with the big metropolitan city. Nonetheless, the researcher may compare the perception of Gen Y employees with older or later generation towards the work-life balance practices to view the differences of perception by distinct generations. Despite the perception of Gen Y employees towards work-life balance being positive which they segmented both worked and life clearly, the organization should try to make initiatives to improve the work-life balance programs in the organization. Besides, it is important for the organization to produce a conducive workplace environment for their employee to be productive and efficient. This is due to the fact that the Gen Y employees need good work-life balance practices in order for them to stay in the organization aside from good pay. Another key point is that work-life balance does not solely depend on individual or employees self, rather the support from workplace has an impact whether the organization provides good work-life balance practices or not. Human resource practitioners may consider providing flexible working hours to increase the importance of work-life balance as well as have the

initiatives to alter the organizational environment which may improve the Gen Y employees feeling of contentment, commitment along with motivation. The usage of updated and upgraded technology may help the human resource practitioner in improving the work-life balance practices within the organization. In the same fashion, it is highly encouraged for human resource practitioner to include the opinion of Gen Y employee in implementing the work-life balance practices desired by them which may fulfill part of their desires. This is to retain the Gen Y talent in the organization which is better for the organization. As work-life balance is being implemented for a long time it is favorable that this term should be advertised widely to the public as it is such a foreign term to them. This would be favorable to both parties, organizationally and individually. For one thing, Gen Y employees have different approach in WLB unlike the generation before and it must be remembered that Gen Y employees emphasize WLB as their main intention to continue working and as an attraction for them to choose jobs as well as retain in the job.

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