



## Exploring Managers' Perception Towards Generation Y Employees: A Case Study in an IT Company in Selangor

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### ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to explore the manager's perception towards Generation Y employees particularly in the IT industry in Selangor. A case study approach was adopted in which data was obtained through semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling technique was used and a total of eight (8) informants participated and interviewed. The data obtained from the interview were qualitatively analyzed. Data analysis was conducted by adopting a content analysis framework in which obtained data were divided into four (4) phases including condensation, code, category and inference and summarize. The findings showed majority of the managers perceived that openness to experience, conscientious and extraversion' are the most common personalities among Generation Y employees. Besides that, the findings also revealed that in terms of work ethics, Generation Y employees are perceived as accountable of own's actions, respect authority, transparency and loyal. The result of this study implicates the organization in terms of attrition and turnover rate among Generation Y employees and organizational branding. The result of this study provided some recommendations to HR practitioners and organizations in managing and handling at the workplace.

*Keywords:* Generation Y; Managers; Personalities; Work ethics; Work values

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### BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Information and Technology (IT) market has evolved massively for the past 10 years and forecast to continuously grow. Just like how the world is evolving in high pace with the emergence of technology, the younger generations whom are growing up closely with the interference of technology; unknowingly they are starting to fill up the gaps in the workforce. As a result, demog-

raphy of workforce has changed rapidly among this few years as Generation Y employees' number are slowly adding up. Baby boomers, Generation X and Generation Y are currently being a part of majority in the workforce (Angeline, 2011). In agreement to that, Josiam, Crutsinger, Reynolds, Dotter, Thozhur, Baum and Devine (2009), mentioned that Malaysia workforce are currently made up of 50% Generation Y employees whereby Generation X employees

has slowly making their way up to senior management roles. Henceforth, sooner or later, the main pillar of Malaysia's workforce will be Generation Y employees while carrying the burden of realizing high income nation on their shoulders. So, it is important that the transition of knowledge; interventions of training and career development should be fully facilitating towards them. However, Twenge (2010), found out a consensus between theorist that this Generation Y requires a totally different set of HR strategy, practices and methods to recruit and retain them. Considine, Horton and Moorman (2009) mentioned that it is important to have a link in the technological world that Generation Y lived in with the working environment employers expect them to work in. However, as much as employers tried to link their world with the working environment or setting new methods to recruit and retain them, the real underlying issue is misunderstood their attitudes, personalities and their characteristics as a human being (Wong, Gardiner & Lang, 2008). Thus, this study aimed to further explore the personalities, work ethics and work values of Generation Y at the workplace particularly in IT industry.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Zaslow (2007) mentioned that Millennials or Generation Y are being discussed as the "most praised" generation due to parental

raising that has positively boost their self-esteem and self-confidence. Prior to that, Twenge (2006) agreed that certain parental approaches towards the development of child has led them to being overconfident, arrogant and feels lie they deserved everything in the world. Problems occurred when labelling and stereotyping became an obstacle for the Millennials or Generation Y to land a job, receiving harsh treatment from their managers and being stereotyped in an organization. According to the Malaysian Statistical Department (2018), Generation Y employees made up over sixty eight percent (68%) of the total workforce in Malaysia yet the fact that about thirty eight percent (38%) of Millennials whom are at the age where they are applicable to work are currently unemployed and estimated of ten percent (10%) just recently lost their jobs. According to Giancola (2006), managing employees based on their age profile ranging from 18 to 80 are not the biggest challenges in an organization but to control managers' unconscious bias and stereotyping towards Generation Y might be the most difficult challenge to overcome. Additionally, a study by Hingginbottom (2017), concluded that negative stereotyping can never be escaped in a multi-diverse generational workforce. Being a part of the "Millennial age", younger workers are becoming stereotypes victims by employers (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011). This unconscious stereotype had led employers in general to avoid hiring younger worker which is why adds up into making things harder for younger generations in landing a secure job (Allison, 2013). Although much has been written on Generation Y in the West namely on hospitality, services and business-related organization, little research has been done particularly in IT industry in Malaysia.

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## METHODS

A case study approach was adopted in which data was obtained through semi-structured interviews. This approach depicted the background of research samples; the managers who were willing to share their views on Generation Y employees namely in terms of their personalities, work ethics and values. The samples were chosen based on the criteria that were set to acquire extensive information on Generation Y in an IT company in Selangor.

Eight (8) managers who had experience working with Generation Y employees were interviewed in qualitative nature and semi-structured manner. Consent forms were given to the informants to sign as to confirm their permission prior to the interview. The main questions asked during the interviews was the following: “What the most common personalities of Gen Y employees that you observed?”. Additional questions discussed were on the work ethics and work values perceived amongst the Generation Y employees. In the subsequent interviews, the researcher had the selected answered (tran-

scribed) from the informants to develop the codes and categories.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The informant’s age range between 38 to 53 years old (see Table 1). In terms of gender, there were five (5) male and three (3) female informants. Majority of the informants had more than 15 years of working experience and all of them were having at least five (5) team members who were identified as Generation Y. Four (4) out of eight (8) informants hold the position as Team Leader while another two (2) informants are from the HR management team. Lastly, another two (2) informants are from the upper management team namely as Head of HR and Head of IT.

The informants described Generation Y employees’ personality as in line with Big Five traits of personalities as in Figure 1.

Majority of the informants mentioned that “openness to experience” as one of the most common personalities among Generation Y employees as perceived by their managers.

**Table 1: Summary of informants’ profile**

Informants	Age	Working experiences	Years of service in the current organization	Number of team members	Number of team members who are identified as Gen Y	Position Title
Informant 1	46	19	9	8	5	Head of HR
Informant 2	41	18	8	7	6	HR Manager Hiring Manager
Informant 3	53	28	15	8	8	Team Leader
Informant 4	39	12	7	8	8	Team Leader
Informant 5	38	11	11	8	7	Team Leader
Informant 6	50	23	5	10	8	Head of IT
Informant 7	42	17	7	9	6	Team Leader
Informant 8	43	19	19	10	6	HR Manager Compensation and Benefits Executive

One of the informants mentioned:

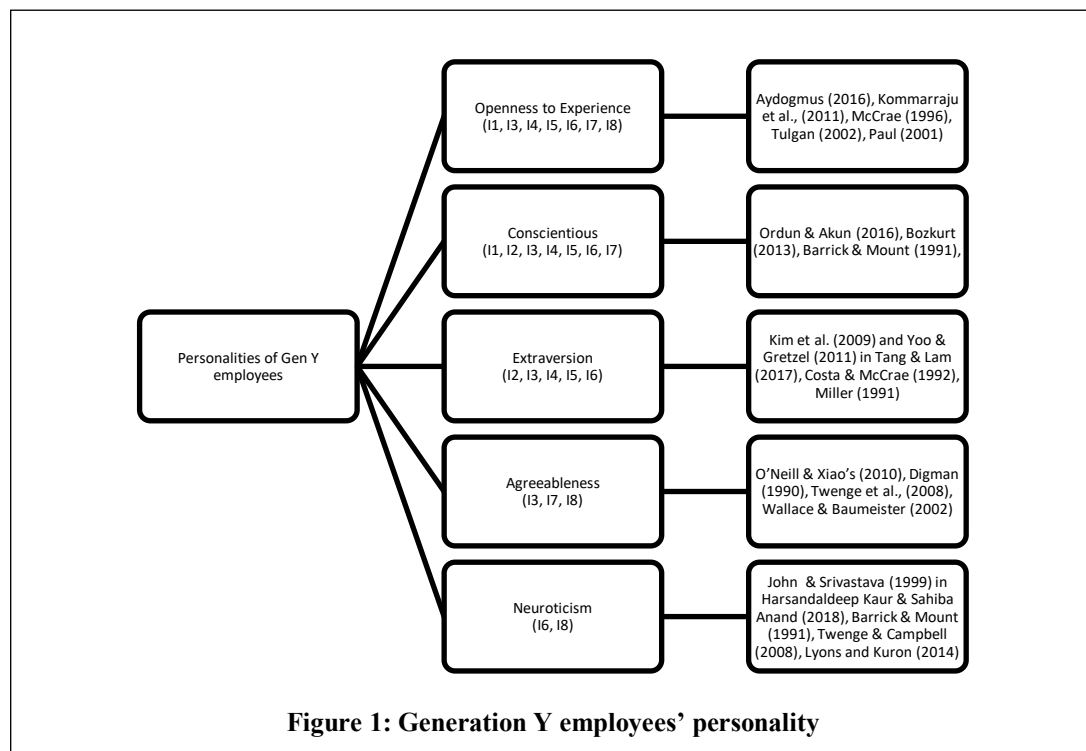
*“I think they're good in creating new ideas, think out of the box, constantly trying to link connection between ideas”*

The above finding is in line with findings by Aydogmus (2016) where it stated that Generation Y tends to have innovative ideas and they are easily mastering new technologies. Besides that, this finding also supports Ko-Kommaraju et al. (2011) in which openness to experience refers to the intellectual differences, sensitivity and imagination. Individuals with highly open minded enjoy learning, always crave for knowledge and creating new ideas. McCrae (1996) were having similar findings cited that individual who score highly in this section tend to have be more creative, interested in artistic, liberalistic, always-want-to-know-why, love adventuring and taking in new information or knowledge like a sponge. In addition, these current findings also consistent with

findings by Paul (2001) declared that this generation is accepting diversity in all different kind of areas of life namely sexuality, ethnic diversity and so on as their personality towards openness. In this study's findings, informants expressed most of their Generation Y employees are creative, open-minded, enjoy learning and gaining new knowledge.

Additionally, in this study, it is proved that majority of the informants agreed that conscientiousness is also the common observed personalities among Generation Y employees. Majority of the informants mentioned that Generation Y employees are independent, displays confidence, diligent, focusing on sense of fulfilment, adaptive and multi-tasking. As mentioned by one of the informants:

*“Even though they multitask but they're very well structured on doing things”*



**Figure 1: Generation Y employees' personality**

The above finding supports the study by Ordun and Akun (2016) in which Generation Y employees are seen to have high conscientiousness and have higher emotional intelligence due their ability to utilize their own emotions in order to increase their performance. Besides that, the above finding is also consistent with a finding by Balç and Bozkurt (2013), where independent, confident, adaptive towards change and multitasking are some of the characteristics that determine Generation Y. It also stated that, conscientiousness is a fundamental personality trait that influences individuals in setting long-term goals rather than short term, thinking twice or maybe thrice when it comes to making decisions, and being earnest about responsibilities towards others. Based on above justification, conscientious employees are well-structured, accountable and responsible. Furthermore, this finding also consistent with findings by Barrick and Mount (1991) where it mentioned that conscientious employees have those equal personality traits where they focus greater on sense of fulfilment, diligent and patient.

Besides that, the above finding also showed that extraversion is also perceived by the managers with regards to Generation Y's employees. This is stated by one of the informants:

*“Works independently, highly resourceful, confident, smart and energetic.”*

Research findings of Kim et al. (2009) and Yoo and Gretzel (2011) in Tang and Lam (2017) indicated that extraversion is related to outgoing, sociable, positive energy toward others and expressiveness. The above finding also supports the finding by Costa and McCrae (1992) where it stated that ex-

traversion individuals are related intimately towards positive emotion such as sociable, friendly, active and loves to talk whereas Miller (1991) showed that people with high extraversion traits desire the chances to communicate and building networking skills with others. Commonly, they are known as individuals with full of life, energy and positivity. In a team, extroverts tend to talk more often and are comfortable with expressing themselves in a large group of people. In this study, all informant stated that Generation Y employees are friendly, loves to talk, energetic, like to be loved and so on.

Interestingly, a few informants also mentioned that agreeableness and neuroticism were perceived among the Generation Y. O'Neill and Xiao's (2010) study found that agreeableness is related to compassion, generosity and cooperation. Other values include softheartedness, understanding and trusting. Besides that, this finding is also consistent with Twenge et al. (2008) increasing in self-esteem or extraversion traits could be directly leading the rise of narcissism trait in oneself. Yet, Wallace & Baumeister (2002) mentioned that, agreeableness personalities are also those whom are searching chances to get popular. However, according to Digman (1990) agreeableness linked with selflessness, compassionate, loving and emotional support, kind and forgiving. However, in this study, findings show that a few informants mentioned that they certainly do not agree in associating Generation Y employees with 'selflessness' and 'high emotional intelligence'. The following quotation illustrates the views from the informants on agreeableness.

*“Like to be loved in a sense of popularity as well. They love being in the center of attraction and craves for attention.”*

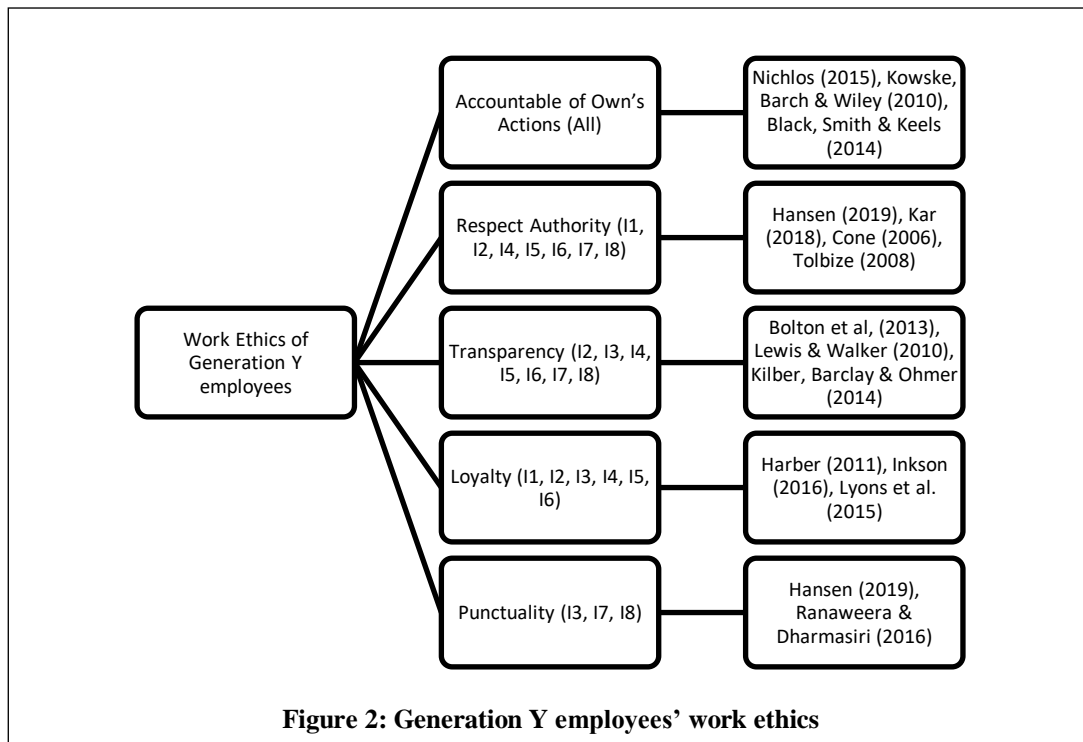
*“Emotional intelligence is how you feel what others feel. How you put yourself in others’ shoe. Gen Y are particularly low at that. They tend to say something without thinking how the other part will feel.”*

The second theme of this paper was exploring the Generation Y employees’ work ethics as perceived by their managers. The informants agreed that work ethics among Generation Y employees were perceived as in Figure 2.

All informants agreed that Generation Y employees are accountable of their own actions. The findings above are similar with the finding by Nichlos (2015), whereby he mentioned that Millennials are not only success oriented, but they feel accountable for their actions. This finding also supported

the findings by Kowske, Barch and Wiley (2010), where it explained that due to the education systems, a sense of accountability has been instilled in this generation even while focusing on achieving goals. This statement is supported by Black, Smith and Keels (2014), where study revealed that Millennials take deeply into consideration of how their actions taken will directly or indirectly affect others around them. This is because the strong moral ethics that has been instilled in them throughout the education systems which is why Gen Y or Millennials have this sense of ‘accountability’ in them. One of the informants highlighted the following:

*“One more thing, they won't blame others if something goes wrong which I think is a good thing because when problems arises, we don't blame anyone. Start thinking and solving it together. I think this work ethics is very crucial in the workforce.”*



**Figure 2: Generation Y employees’ work ethics**

Majority of the informants revealed that 'respect authority' as one of the most common work ethics shown by Generation Y employees. This is in line with the findings by Hansen (2019), whom revealed the myth of perception towards Generation Y. Most of the Generation Y yearn to have relationships with their boss like the ones they have with their own parents. Apart from this, this finding is also supporting the finding by Kar (2018), where this study revealed that Generation Y value respect and trust most. One of the informants mentioned the following:

*"They respect authority because although they don't like me doing that to them, but they still let me do it because I am their Team Lead, I have the rights to know how they are doing, and it is my job to guide them."*

Almost all informants stated that 'transparency' as one of the work ethics possessed by Generation Y employees. Bolton et al. (2013) mentioned that transparency is highly valued by Generation Y due to the social upbringing and environmental factors as well. They practice transparency as their main principle to judge an action. The reason on why they are continuously seeking out information and knowledge is because they want to know the 'why' not 'how' are we doing this. This finding similar with the findings by Lewis and Walker (2010), where study revealed that the Millennials are more interested in asking questions on why things are being done and what are the underlying reasons behind every decision made. Furthermore, it must be understood that Generation Y employees are not interrogating seniority or authority, but they emphasize on the efficiency of a process. (Kilber, Barclay & Ohmer, 2014). Not to

directly implying that Gen Y wants to know the secret of their business but to be truthful and transparent to them meant the world to them. In addition, it also provides a better understanding of how to get things done in a proper way. Millennials are raised in an environment where information are just under the tips of their finger which is why emphasize on transparency and free flow of information. One of the informants stated that:

*"They tend to get easily frustrated with ambiguity and slow processes. In another word, they place high value on transparency and trust."*

Majority informants also mentioned 'loyalty' as one of the Generation Y work ethics. This finding is in line with the finding from Harber (2011), where several studies have shown that monetary value such as money is important for their sense of loyalty, but it is not the sole reason of why that employees stay at a certain company. In modern organizational setting, employees oversee own career development whereby everything is driven by opportunities and individual motivated rather than being spoon-fed by employers (Inkson, 2006). This resulted that in modern day workforce setting, employees are free to do whatever they want on how to improve their skills, how they manage their own career path, pursuing variety of opportunities growth and when they want to achieve it (Lyons et al., 2015). In addition, this finding is also similar with Buckley, Viechnicki and Barua (2015) where they mentioned that Generation Y only show their loyalty when they can gain job fulfillment, good reward system, fair promotion policy, flexibility in work and ability to achieve their personal objectives in the or-

ganization. The following quotation illustrates the one of the informants view on this:

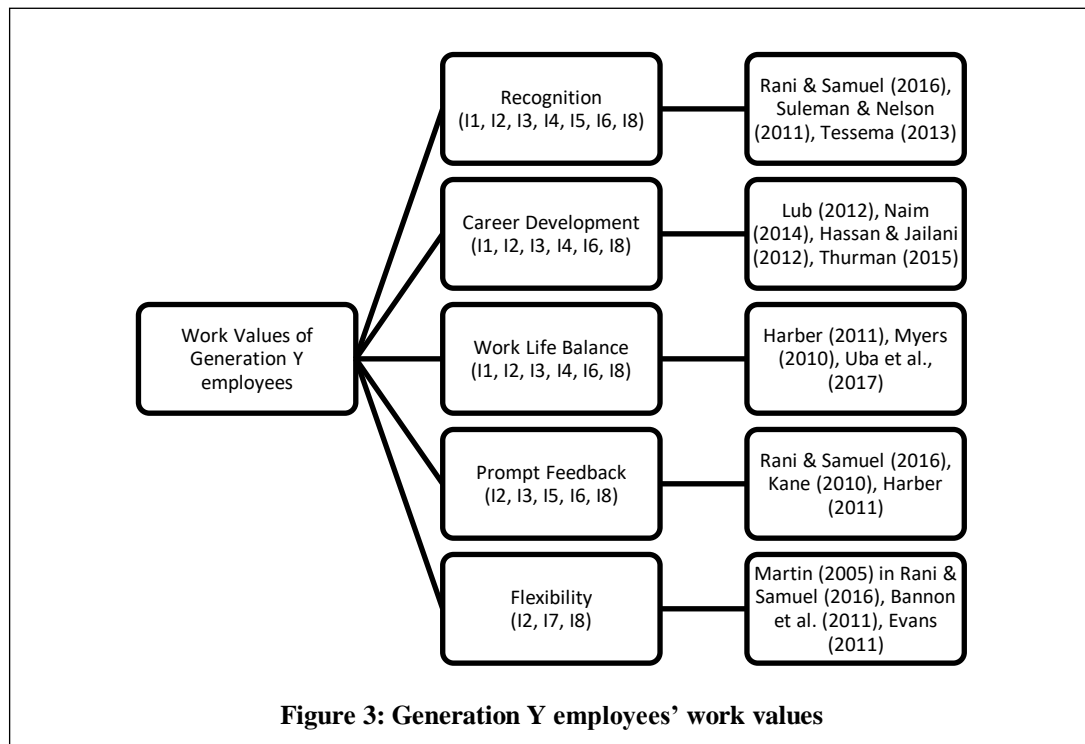
*“For now, I see is the attrition rate is high, so the loyalty is there. I mean, to keep them of course we must put in lots of effort, but we do not want to hire the wrong people which is why we always tend to put in lots of effort in their career path and make sure that they engage.”*

Several informants mentioned that ‘punctuality’ as one of the work ethics among Generation Y employees. This finding is in line with Hansen (2019), where he argued the myth of perception towards Generation Y. Hansen (2019) revealed that Gen Y employees are being labelled as ‘not punctual’ is not entirely true. Generation Y prioritize punctuality in regards of time management and delivery of projects the same as previous generations. The myth existed because of certain individuals with lack of discipline tainted the whole generation but as the time

changes, Generation Y has learned to be more punctual. This finding also supports the study by Ranaweera and Dharmasiri (2016), where the study mentioned that some stereotype Millennials are such as self-centered, unmotivated, no sense of punctuality, disrespectful, and disloyal. It is clear from these explanations that different scholars or researchers have identified positive and negative characteristics of Millennials based on their own explanation and findings with different context of the study. One of the informants mentioned the following:

*“Getting things done before heading home? Our office hour is 8am to 5pm, they won’t take extra-long lunch hours, they will ensure work for today is done today, they won’t prolonged it. In another sense, yes, that’s punctuality as well. Deliver within the time frame.”*

The third theme of this paper was exploring



**Figure 3: Generation Y employees’ work values**



the Generation Y employees' work values as perceived by their managers. The informants agreed that work values among Generation Y employees were perceived in Figure 3.

Majority of the informants perceived 'recognition' as one of the Generation Y's work values. Most of Generation Y's values are driven by a sense of entitlement of rewards irrespective of their actual performance levels (Rani & Samuel, 2016). Suleman and Nelson (2011) mentioned about recognition programs or awards are one of a practice that managers can use to motivate Generation Y employees. It makes them feel appreciated and recognized. In addition, a small 'thank-you' or 'good job' can easily make their day. Such acknowledgement is essential so that they will feel fulfilled and appreciated. Study by Tessema (2013) also revealed that recognition can also lead to higher work satisfaction and employee engagement levels, and eventually leading to greater productivity. One of the informants mentioned the following:

*"Immediate feedback, recognition and work-life balance. A simple word of 'thank you' 'good job' 'well done' are the words that will make Gen Y happy and feel appreciated."*

Majority of the informants also mentioned that 'career development' as one of the work values among Generation Y employees. Lub (2012) mentioned about Generation Y employees prioritize the need for learning and self-development. They value continuous learning opportunities offered by organizations to evaluate their employment offers and therefore eventually deciding to which organization they decided to stay

with on a longer period. Henceforth, in order in ensuring themselves to stay competent in the labor market, Generation Y employees continuously trying to upgrade their knowledge, skills and abilities (Naim, 2014). Subsequently, the main reason of them job hopping for better progression is also due to the availability of career advancement, learning tracks and self-developmental programs in the organization. They hop the jobs in search of better advancement opportunities. In addition, a study by Hassan and Jailani in 2012 discovered that the main reason why Generation Y employees prefer good training and career development program is because they are still considered as newbie in the workforce and lack of working experiences. Moreover, supporting to the statements above, 89.79% of Generation Y employees agreed they want job-specific opportunities to gain skills for career development when choosing an employer (Thurman, 2015). The statement below illustrates the explanation by one of the informants:

*"Yet, career growth opportunity and individual development attracts them the most. Intellectually stimulating and acquiring new knowledge or skill. They would like to see how their career growth can be charted upfront, and what it takes to get there. They want a very defined checklist."*

Subsequently, majority of the informants stated that 'work-life balance' as one of the work values that can be seen among Gen Y employees. Harber (2011) stated that Generation Y would rather have few working hours in order to create a healthier work life balance. Generation Y are different from the previous generations because previous generations think that they were needed in the

workforce, without them, operations in the company will be pointless. However, on the contrary, Generation Y value family life and will do any scarification for the interconnection with their family. According to Myers (2010), a recent survey found out that Generation Y desire a work life balance that will allow them to balance play with work. As mentioned by Mohare and Agrawal (2016), stated that work from home would be highly preferable for this generation as this could also help in achieving their work life balance. The statement below illustrates the answer given by one of the informants:

*“Work life balance, career path, recognition, immediate feedback or advice. Regardless of being single or married, Gen Y has more attachment towards family compare to other generation. In another words, work-life balance for them is a must. Not only that, they still hold great meaning of life other than just work.”*

Most of the informants also mentioned that ‘prompt feedback’ as one of the work values among Generation Y employees. Rani and Samuel (2016) mentioned that Generation Y employees value regular and consistent feedback and recognition. Besides that, Kane (2010) stated that Generation Y mostly desire attention, feedback, praise, and craves for guidance or supervision from an experienced counsellor or senior. The feedback craves by Generation Y should be up-to-date and up to the minute or even seconds (Harber, 2011). Generation Y employees are motivated when given the freedom to work as they please, not wanting their manager telling them what to do, but they do desire regular feedback. They felt silence is giving them a sign that they are doing things wrongly. The Generation Y employees want

to know if they are doing the job well or not. One of them indicated the following statement:

*“Positive working environment and quick feedback. About quick feedback, they just want reassurance that they are doing the right thing and they want to produce the good and satisfying results.”*

Finally, ‘flexibility’ is also one of the work values mentioned by majority of the informants. Generation Y also expect freedom and flexibility to do their work in their own way and at their own pace (Martin, 2005 in Rani & Samuel, 2016). Bannon et al. (2011), revealed that giving flexibility working schedules to the Generation Y would allow them to enjoy their life besides work. This could lead to increasing of productivity level. This finding is also similar with findings by Evans (2011) where it reported due to the advancement of technologies, anyone can work at anywhere and hence it is not possible that no office will be built in the future. Henceforth, Generation Y employees expected to be more connected socially, professionally than physically. The first thing they do when they wake up is checking their e-mails. So, they can settle their work even before reaching the office. (Evans, 2011). One of the informants highlighted that:

*“Flexibility. From working attire to working hours to everything. Gen Y wants to be flexible. They don't like to be constrained or felt like living in a prison. They want to enjoy work which is why I think flexibility is what attract them the most.”*

## CONCLUSION

Findings from this research were an assurance for Generational Cohort Theory (GCT) which was first founded by Manheniem (1972). From this study, some finding supports the generational cohort theory whereby generations were being segregate due to the individuals experiencing differences of social impacts, political, economic changes and social construct. Resulting in differences of individuals' personalities, work ethics and work values among generations in the workplace due to them shaping of own beliefs, values, goals, and mainly the consequences of their living environment. Sometimes, a generation is not created because of biological need but rather it was done on a basis of the social context. A clear example of this are in tribal communities. In this communities, big events rarely happen hence change is painfully slow and because of this there are no distinct generations for us to differentiate and which is why we named them the tribal communities rather Generations X, Y or Z. The findings from this study also implicates on how managers perceived the Generation Y employees as 'highly openness to experiences' type of individual. So, it is important for the organization to identify the right plans to be executed in retaining their employees. At the same time, this current study shows that 'recognition', 'prompt feedback' and 'flexibility' have been perceived as today's Generation Y employees' work values. Hence, it is vital for the organization to take effort such as providing them with intervention or platform which will help them to boost their productivity. Furthermore, initiatives such as flexible working conditions, incentives such as extra vacation time, providing instant and regular feedback would suit the

younger generation today. In addition, it is suggested that the training program can be refined and adopted for the suitability of Generation Y employees such as e-learning rather than the old school method of using paper and books, but it has to be implement wisely so that the organization does not lose their employees' engagement due to the advancement of technology. Not to forget, the most important thing in employee engagement is communication. Communication works best for resolving conflict and misunderstandings. This benefit the organization at their attrition rate, turnover rate and their branding. The researchers would like to recommend that extended study should be conducted to explore the Generation Y employees in the IT departments of government sector in Malaysia.

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