Perception of Generation Y Employees: An Exploratory Study

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"Many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on our point of view."

Obi-Wan Kenobi

Abstract

An exploratory study was conducted to study the perceptions of Workplace Romance, Women managers and employers by Generation Y employees and the perception of Generation Y employees by managers and employers. The study was necessitated as there has not been any study conducted to know the perception of Generation Y employees in the context of organizations. The paper presents the perception of: Workplace romance, Women Managers and Employers by Generation Y employees and the perception of Generation Y employees by Managers and Employers. 58 executives in the age group of 24 to 28 years and 10 Managers and 8 employers in the age group of 50-60 years from four sectors, viz., IT, Banking, BPO and Retail were interviewed for the purpose of the study. The rationale behind selecting these four sectors was based on the assumption that the executives of these sectors were fast paced. Fast paced is used in the sense of fast career, fast food, fast money, fast success, fast moving, fun loving, etc. That means the managers and the Employers were, of late, exposed of a different mind set of employees.

Keywords: *Perception, Generation Y, Women Managers*

Introduction

"Perception is the process of receiving information about and making sense of the world around. It entails deciding which information to notice, how to categorize this information and how to interpret it with in the framework of existing knowledge." (McShane and Von Glinov, 2005). Generation Y is the people who were born between 1977 and 1997. This generation has grown up amidst more sophisticated technologies. This is a generation that grew up with e-mail. There is both good news and bad news for employers. Good news is that Generation-Y will be good at engaging in multiple tasks, filtering out distractions, and juggling numerous projects. The bad news- Short term attention spans, the constant need for stimulation or entertainment and a blurring of the lines between work and leisure time while on the job! (Cascio, 2003).

The study was also initiated with the assumption that Generation Y employees are fast. They look for fast career, fast food, fast money& fast success etc. Apart from its demographic composition, the workforce today is changing in other ways. "The Generation Y cohort aged 23 and under in 2000, is shaped by economic prosperity and the Internet. This cohort is more idealistic and less cynical than Generation Xers" (Kotler, 2003). The issues, viz., Perception of Office Romance, Women Managers and expectations of Managers and Employers, are discussed together as: 1) Office romance is of late a concern in the organizations, 2) Many women managers are taking hold of leadership rein and 3) The employers are exposed to a new breed of employees. So, perception of all these people is helpful in understanding the behaviour of people at work.

Methodology

The study is an Exploratory Research because the area of investigation is new and vague that an exploration is needed to learn something about the dilemma facing the manager. There is also a need to expand the understanding of management dilemma. The management dilemma in the context is whether to differentiate the management practices among Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y employees in the same organization. "Exploration is the process of collecting information to formulate or refine management research, investigative or measurement questions..." (Cooper, 2006)

Exploratory studies are loosely structured studies that discover future research tasks, including developing concepts, establishing priorities, developing operational definitions and improving research design. The immediate purpose of exploration is usually to develop hypotheses or questions for further research.

Research Design: Exploratory

Sampling Design: Convenient Sampling

Sample size: 76

Data collection method: Interview

Data Analysis: Simple Percentage

All the 76 were interviewed by the author. The following questions were used to generate data for the study.

To Generation Y employees

- What is your opinion of workplace romance?

- Does workplace romance impact productivity?

- How is it to work under the leadership of a woman manager?

- What are the merits and demerits of woman managers?

- What do employers expect from you?

To Managers

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of Generation Y employees?

To Employers

- What are the expectations of Generation Y employees?

Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- To study the perception of workplace romance by Generation Y employees.

- To study the perception of women managers by Generation Y employees.

- To study the perception of Employers by Generation Y employees.

- To study the perception of Generation Y employees by managers and employers.

Discussions

Perception of Workplace Romance by Generation Y Employees

The study identified that workplace romance would influence four areas of work and workplace.

a. Productivity

88% of the respondents felt that productivity of not only the parties involved in workplace romance but also the other people in the work area was affected. "It is easier to say, 'Your business is not the business in the next table', but difficult to practice" as one respondent commented. Work culture is found to be affected since the relationships affected the environment as a whole.

b. Personal relationships and attitudes

Faults are thin when love is thick but faults are thick when love is thin. 86% of the respondents were in line with the saying as their tolerance of workplace romance was purely influenced by the relationship that

they have with their peers. When they liked their peers, they were tolerant of the disturbances if any. When they are not on terms with the peers, they made issues out of it.

c. Ego problems

So far men are men problems tend to exist. The petty quarrels and foibles and misunderstandings between the people involved in romance definitely affected the workplace. 83% of the respondents opined that the sort of vibration the disturbed the workplace. "At times they forget that they are in a common place and start fighting over irrelevant issues" as one respondent pointed out.

d. Organisational objectives

It was found, based on the responses of 81% of the respondents, that the organizations were tolerant of workplace romance as long as the organization's objectives were attained. Most of the organizations operate on the basis of targets set. Work place romance was not a major issue as long as the targets were achieved.

Perceptions of Women Managers by Generation Y Employees

Men and women perceive the world differently. They think, they talk, make decisions and take actions differently. This brings gender issue into play in a workplace. This belief created the need for a study on the perception of women managers.

a. Working under the direction of women managers

93% of the respondents expressed that they did not have any reservations in working under the guidance of women managers. They looked at the women managers as professionals irrespective of gender differences.

b. Strengths of Women Managers

i) High concentration in time management (93% of the respondents)

They were known for punctuality. For them 10.a.m is 10.am. There is no compromise on schedules.

ii) No Gender discrimination (91% of the respondents)

They have the ability to maintain relationship with both the genders. Their strength is to look at people as colleagues.

iii) Continual Learning

88% of the respondents observed that the managers had the willingness to learn. They understood the need for continual learning.

iv) High Commitment (84% of the respondents)

Women Managers were highly committed to the accomplishment of tasks. This is obvious as they had high concentration in time management. They know that commitment is the ability to complete tasks within the stipulated time.

c. Weaknesses of Women Managers

There are two weaknesses of women managers as perceived by the employees. They are:

i) Risk Taking Capacity

52% of the respondent expressed that the women managers were moderate in risk taking, 25% of them found them to be poor in risk taking and 23% of the respondents expressed that the managers were good at risk taking. "They", as one responded commented, "analyse a lot. At times, they think too much of the consequence of the actions. As a result it becomes too late to do anything."

ii) Decision Making Skill

Their decision making skill is neither bad nor very good. 57% of the respondents expressed that they were good at decision making. "They can concentrate on this area to improve their skills. They keep checking and rechecking their decisions with others.

Perception of Employers by Generation Y employees

a. Integrity (93% of the respondents)

One thing they cannot compromise is integrity. One employer said, "It is just not fair. An employee negotiates with your competitor while attending a training programme sponsored by you." The employers expected the Generation Y employees to be loyal to the organizations. They expected this since the turnover has been very high.

b. Positive attitude (91% of the respondents)

One respondent said that employers look for attitude while hiring. They believe that skill can be inculcated if attitude is positive. Most of the employers pay a premium for attitude. The very old saying 'attitude decides your altitude' still holds good.

c. Taking responsibility (88 % of the respondents)

Accountability for performance is a quality expected by employers. They don't want these people to hang about waiting to be told what to do. The employers expect the employees to be proactive.

d. Long term association (91% of the respondents)

Most of them look for long term association. They say if people do not stay with an organization at least for two to three years, there cannot be considerable contribution. The tendency will always be to look for

greener pastures. Let us not forget that the other side of the shore is always green.

Perception of Generation Y Employees by Managers

"Members of Generation Y are often described as pragmatic, savvy, socially and environmentally aware and open to new experiences" (Schiffman, 2004). But, they are different from their predecessors. These workers are less devoted to long-term career prospects and less willing to adapt to a corporate mindset that stresses conformity and uniformity (Moorhead & Griffin, 2000).

a. Strengths

i) Communication Skill (81% of the respondents)

Speaking and listening skills of Generation Y employees are found to be very good. But, lack writing skill. Unfortunately we are not writing people. We do not write anything without any need. Most of our writings are formal writings. Though, writing is everyone's forte, there can be a little drilling by way of descriptive writing to sharpen writing skills. "Report wring skill is a neglected one" commented one manager.

ii) Latest business knowledge (81% of the respondents)

They keep updating themselves about the business trends. "Some employees are extremely good at tracking the performance of organizations." This awareness helps them associate the business implications.

iii) Adaptability (80% of the respondents)

It is found that they are adaptable to any situation. This may be because of their being exposed to a variety of situations. They are more fun loving. They are highly humourous. A manager was all smiles when he said,

"At times the workplace is electrified. And that makes work interesting and easier."

iv) Crisis management (70% of the respondents)

They are not stressed much. They have enormous resistance. They work extended hours without loss of energy.

v) Quick learning (60% of the respondents)

Willingness to learn from peers and superiors is very high. They have a strong growth mind set. That is one of the reasons they keep growing the corporate ladder fast.

b. Weaknesses

i) Choosy (81% of the respondents)

They prefer white collar jobs. Their initial expectation is well furnished rooms. They are at times not ready to do any work assigned to them. They will not attempt if they do not feel like doing a job.

ii) Prefer high salary and increase (70% of the respondents)

There is a strong tendency to compare pay across industries. They are easily distracted if the increase of their peers in the organization or their friends elsewhere is a little higher. One manager's observation was that, "They are clear about what they deserve and they demand that. This is because of multiple opportunities."

iii) Technically not sound (70% of the respondents)

Though they have awareness of the developments and changes in businesses scenario, they do not have expertise in technology.

iv) Poor interaction with colleagues (70% of the respondents)

Interpersonal skills have taken a back seat. Most of them feel that they are individuals, there are individual targets and there is no need to interact more.

Perception of Generation Y Employees by Employers

a. More freedom (90% of the respondents)

The employer's statement is wisdom for all when he said, "They (Generation Y Employees) are not clear about the difference between boundaries and freedom." Any business has to operate within boundaries. Else it becomes distorted freedom. There is no control for freedom but boundaries are there.

b. Flexibility in schedules (87% of the respondents)

The employees are for flexibility in everything. They cannot stand orderliness. Managers must build enough flexibility in the organization to accommodate an ever changing set of lifestyles and preferences (Moorhead & Griffin, 2000) At times this quality is a blessing. Businesses operate in a lot of uncertainties. Flexibility in nature helps you manage the demanding situations.

c. Individualized incentives (87% of the respondents)

Moorhead and Griffin voiced that Managers are increasingly faced with challenges of new and different incentives to keep people motivated and interested in their work (2000).

An employer's concern could be read when he said, "A few of them are money minded and shift organization if they are offered even for a paltry sum." They expect pay for performance. Incentives given to them must be individualized.

d. A lot of socialization (87% of the respondents)

Parties, celebrations, fun in the workplace, etc., are the order of modern day organizations.

These practices help them develop camaraderie among themselves. Hence occupational stressors are mitigated.

e. Priority to career growth (75% of the respondents)

What's in it for me (WIIFM) is the demand of every employee belonging to this generation. Any activity should add value to their career. One employer's observation is that "These employees want to climb the corporate ladder fast. And a few of them are succeeding in it."

f. Ambitious (75% of the respondents)

They can visualize where they will be in three years or four years down the line. Career clarity is very high. They dream big and try to realize their dreams. "Optimism and big expectation for the future is a trait often ascribed to Generation Y" (Lawrence, 1999)

Conclusion

Cascio observed that there is both good news and bad news for employers. It can be inferred from the analysis that there are more merits than demerits in the Generation Y employees. This is certainly good news for employers.

The study can be further expanded to verify the hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1

Generation Y employees have more merits than demerits.

Hypothesis 2

There is no perceptual difference between the employees belonging to Generation Y and Baby Boomers.

Hypothesis 3

There is no perceptual difference between the employees belonging to Generation Y and Generation X.

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