New Ponies, Old Tricks? Younger Generations Entering the Workforce – Characteristics, Problems and HRM Consequences

WOLFGANG MAYRHOFER
WU, Vienna, Austria

ODD NORDHAUG
NHH, Bergen, Norway

CARLOS OBESO
ESADE, Barcelona, Spain

Abstract:
In the recent decades, flashy labels such as GenY, Millennials, or Plurals have occurred to describe new generations with different value systems and expectations. Often, these differences are linked to technological changes, globalization, and value change. For organizations, this raises the issue of how to manage these generations once they enter the workforce. This chapter outlines major characteristics of these generations, identifies key problems linked with the integration of these individuals into the workforce and discuss consequences for human resource management (HRM). In particular, it will present the results of a study on graduates of a European elite master program in management and their expectations about work in general, the role of work in their lives and about future employers.

Keywords:
human resource management (HRM), careers, new generations, work force, Generation Y, business school graduates, Europe

1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, characteristics of individuals entering the work force and potential consequences for human resource management (HRM) have been getting some attention. Two major factors contribute to this. First, new developments in the area of information and communication technologies, in particular the growing importance of the internet and the availability of new communication devices such as laptops or smartphones not only have changed the way we communicate. They also seem to have an effect on the way children and young adults grow up, how they are socialized and what experiences, skills and expectations they possess when starting to work. Second, globalization, with its many effects on different levels, increases the mobility of adolescents across national and cultural boundaries. In Europe, the European Union deliberately supports such forms of mobility through various mobility programs such as ERASMUS. As a consequence, organisations and HRM specialists have started to wonder to what extent the new cohorts entering the labour market – often marked by flashy labels such as millenials or Gen Y – differ from the well-known employee groups already part of the work process.

Our chapter looks at selected aspects of this issue. After briefly highlighting major conceptual cornerstones in the area of generational, value, and career research, we will present main results of a study on graduates of an elite business school program (CEMS, see www.cems.org) and their expectations towards work and career[1].

2　Conceptual background

2.1　Different generations

Generations encompass individuals who are born within a certain period of time. These generational groups are also called cohorts. A cohort represents a group of people who basically share the same life experiences both in relation to historical events and social life at large. Moreover, it is commonly held that these experiences affect these cohorts throughout the individuals' lives: "A cohort develops a personality that influences a person's feelings toward authority and organizations, what they desire from work, and how they plan to satisfy those desires" ([1]: 365). Below we briefly characterize major generations currently relevant for the labour market.

Pre-war generations refer to the cohorts that were born between 1910 and 1933 as the World War II-ers and the following generation born between 1933 and 1945 as the Swingers [2]. Other terms that have been used are Traditionals, Matures or The Silent Generation for those born before 1940 [3].

The generation called baby boomers, due to the large amounts of births compared to former generations, is normally made up of individuals born between 1940 and 1960, or between 1946 and 1964 [4]. They are also sometimes referred to as the post-war generation. Important events or developments that have contributed to shaping the beliefs and values of the cohorts within this generation are rebuilding of countries after the second world war, the fights for civil rights, the cold war, the student revolutions around 1968, and the Vietnam War.

The so called Generation X comprises persons who were born between the early or mid-1960s and 1980, although some set the upper limit to 1975 or 1982 [5]. This has become the most important generation in contemporary work life since the baby boomers have started to retire in substantial numbers. It is also the first generation that has not been much confronted and familiar with traditional values. These individuals grew up in times characterized by various forms of instability, such as high divorce rates and greater diversity in society. According to some researchers this has resulted in a stronger individualism [6]. It has also been claimed that this generation is accustomed to receiving instant feedback and gratification in most contexts. This might be illustrated by the widespread use of mobile phones, text messages, e-mail, and virtual social networks such as Facebook, where immediate response is the norm. They are comfortable with change, diversity, and individual competition [7].

The subsequent Generation Y consists of individuals born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s. It is also referred to as the Millenials or the Next Generation [8]. This generation grew up with the new technologies and the internet. They are believed to have even higher expectations than Generation X, not least since it has, until the recent financial world crisis, experienced nothing but progress and increasing living standards. At the same time, there are indications that these individuals seem to worship material values less strongly than Generation X [9].

2.2　Changes in Values and Preferences

Baegthe [10] has contended that western societies are developing into an increasingly individualistic path as a result of modernity processes supported by the safety net provided by the welfare state. He argued that changes in education and work life have strongly affected the work related values of young German adults. More emphasis is being put on developing one's own personality and opportunities for self-expression. Like Baegthe, Maccoby [11] also views the emergence of new work-related values as caused by modernity processes and structural changes, implying leaner, less hierarchical and less bureaucratic business organizations. As a result, the amount of traditional advancement opportunities and managerial power has shrunk and it may in this renewed context be considered rational to offer less status-oriented and more self-development directed forms of incentives and rewards. Less hierarchy and bureaucracy also implies greater uncertainty and need for increased flexibility in many areas. Generation Y individuals grew up in times characterized by swift changes in society and work life and probably possess more tolerance for uncertainty than former generations who grew up in times with much more stability and slower changes and typically have experience much more team and project work during their education.

In addition to the perspectives mentioned, there is another line of reasoning that claims that there has been a swing from materialistic to post materialistic motives in relation to work [12]. This is interpreted partly as a result of general prosperity in western countries making many people look for qualitative rewards instead of more material goods and higher status. According to this reasoning, the impact of raises in compensation is expected to be reduced whereas as qualitative aspects of work become more important as motivating factors.

2.3　New careers and a changing relationship between individuals and organizations

The concept of boundaryless careers – recently criticized as being too one-sided [13] – was introduced in the mid-1990ies [14] and since then there has been a growing body of research based on the concept [15]. It is conceptualized as self-development through inter-company mobility rather than through intra-company learning, which is the traditional way of development implying intra-firm mobility and long-term commitment. Some of the hallmarks of a boundaryless career include: portable skills, knowledge, and abilities across multiple firms,

personal identification with meaningful work, on-the-job action, development of multiple networks and peer learning relationships, and individual responsibility for career management.

Almost concurrently, another career concept was launched, protean careers [16]. These careers are characterized by developing independently of traditional career develop arrangements [17]. The protean career centres on a conception of psychological success resulting from individual career management, as opposed to career planning and development arranged by the organization. Protean careers have been characterized as involving greater mobility, a more whole-life perspective, and a developmental progression [18], involving both a values-driven attitude and a self-directed attitude toward career planning [19].

As a consequence of these developments, there have been profound changes in the relationship between employees and employers in western countries. The notions of job security and long-term employment have been weakened. At the same time, job mobility – or at least the rhetoric favouring it – has increased. Another way of phrasing this is to say that the psychological contracts between individual and organization have changed substantially [20]. Relational contracts, typically characterized by mutual loyalty, have to a large extent been substituted with transactional contracts. The increased job mobility between employers indicates decreased loyalty on the part of the employees, whereas processes such as outsourcing signify a lower commitment on the part of the employers.

3 Sample and Methods

The collection of data has been done in two ways: through a comprehensive survey for which a questionnaire was developed, and through in-depth interviews with students. The survey sample includes 339 students from the CEMS Master in Management (MIM) classes of 2007-08 and 2008-09 out of a total of 1,330 individuals constituting the CEMS Master in Management (MIM) classes of 2007-08 and 2008-09 (response rate of 39.2 per cent). Students from 37 countries are included, and the most strongly represented groups are from Germany, Italy, Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria, Switzerland, France, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Hungary and Finland. The sample comprises 53 % female and 47 % male students, and the average age of the respondents is 24 years.

The interview sample consists of 34 CEMS-MIM students who were interviewed at the ESADE and WU campus, respectively, using an interview guideline emphasizing the narrative component [21]. The average length of the interviews was 45 minutes. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. On top of this, 52 contributions to an essay writing competition on ‚The future World of Work‘ during ‚Forum Alpbach 2007‘ in Austria[2] were available. Contributors consist of young professionals from a variety of European countries.

The texts resulting from transcription were coded, using NVivo 7.0. In general, qualitative content analysis [22] was used to analyse respondent’s statements and available essay contributions. Additionally, special issues emerging, e.g. the importance of the psychological contract, were focused on in more depth in order to get a richer picture.

4 Results

In the following we present some main empirical findings.

4.1 Personal identity

When looking at the major source for personal identity, the following picture emerges (see Figure 1).

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[2] The authors acknowledge the contribution of *Die Presse*, a major nationwide Austrian newspaper, for supplying these contributions which remained completely anonymous.
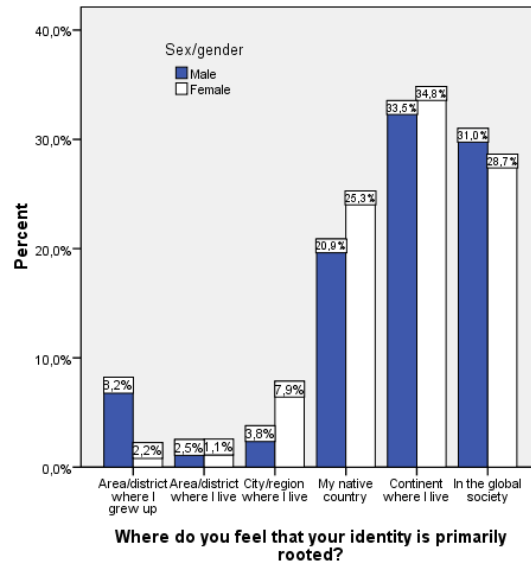
Figure 1: Primary roots for personal identity (Source: unpublished report)

Roughly, the three more or less equally numbered groups emerge. A first group sees their primary identity roots in the global society. Local, regional, national or even continental aspects do not play a role for 31% of the men and 28.7% of the women. A second group sees the strongest roots in the continent where they live (33.5% of the men and 34.8% of the women). The third group perceives its identity roots to be located at the national or more confined level (city/region, area/district). 35.4% of the men and 36.5% of the women belong to this group, with the native country being most prominent (men 20.9%; 2 women 5.3%).

The feelings on origin are rather ambivalent and participants' own nationality still plays a role in their personal identity:

I am from...okay, I am from Germany first of all, and that's my nationality.

It's...I think I am proud of the city where I was born; St. Petersburg is a really great city and I really love my country because it is so rich, it provides so many opportunities.

A European identity as a primary identity is very rare but there is a "feeling" of belonging to a supranational entity called Europe:

I am from France but I am from Europe as well. Let me give you an example: if Spain was playing against the U.S, I would play for Spain… But, I really think the future is in Europe, because we are not going to leave our own country but this is the only way we can have a role outside.

Beyond origin, in terms of identity interviewees have extremely high levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy beliefs. This is consistent with current generational research [23]. However, the interviewees of this sample score particularly high on these dimensions, viewing themselves as high-potentials of an already highly socially segregated population (i.e., business students). Future success is taken for granted, and all too often, their career aspiration is "becoming a CEO":

We are in a school which is going to create leaders, and that's a lot about okay, so we wish all to be CEOs.

4.2   Role of work

Contrary to considerations emphasizing a culture of consumerism as central for younger generations, the respondents place work and effort at the very center of their lives. For them work means effort, working hard. Respondents are prepared to work a lot:

Work is a big part of my life and for me it is very important because when I don't have to do something or I don't have work I really don't know what to do with my time, it's fine to have two or three or maybe even more moths of holidays, but after that I really need to do something because I feel bad, useless, whatever, so that's really important and crucial that it's challenging and you have new experiences not every day the same....yeah.

I could work 10, 12, 14 hours at the moment, I don't feel any difficulties with that now though I would like to have some time for the personal life...

Work means effort, of course, and means... working hard!

In addition, the respondents reveal that for them work has multiple meanings. Work must have a moral meaning, be perceived as morally clean and meaningful in terms of results, i.e. something must be achieved.

Consequently, a good place to work is not just a nice place but a challenging, positive and results-oriented environment. What you do is more important than 'job title or employer's reputation and must be closely related with individual competence development. Little surprising, then, that they see individual appraisal and individual responsibility as important parts of job content – but in an environment of "structured freedom" where somebody sets the limits and the objectives.

4.3 Stages of development

For the respondents, occupying a specific position somewhere in the future is not a primary goal. Consequently, a career does not primarily mean "ascending in the hierarchy". Although there is consensus that improving your competences and assuming more and more responsibility leads to hierarchical advancement, promotion is not an end in itself but a logical and natural consequence.

There is a clear understanding that their personal career consists of two stages. Stage 1 starts after finishing university. Its characteristics are:

> a period in which they will develop profoundly and enlarge their portfolio of competences;
> strong preference for working for large multinationals where opportunities to develop are greater;
> a highly dynamic period, where standing still is not an option;
> need to change employers during this period in order to develop but also to broaden their range of competences;
> primarily responsible for their careers, the decision of when to change job/employer and where to go is their own responsibility;
> dislike for the idea of a structured career plan.

Stage 2 starts when respondents will be in their early 30s. Its characteristics contain:

> offering even more options and by then they will act as full professionals;
> half think that they will opt for working in companies, although only few individuals assume that they will develop within a single company;
> the other half opts for careers outside/alongside companies where free-floating professionalism is very attractive;
> the classic objectives of income and hierarchical advancement as indicators of a successful career are still important but not paramount.

Overall, survey respondents' views of their careers are very much determined by an internal locus of control, with a faith in their competences as the determinant issue in career development and where recognition for one's career implies making efforts to achieve goals. The latter demonstrates a great degree of self-confidence.

4.4 Preferred career fields

The concept of career fields [24] differentiates between typical arenas along two axes, building on insight from organisational theory and social psychology. The coupling dimension focuses on the closeness of relationships and the degree of mutual influence between the focal actor and the other actor(s) in the field [25]. Tight coupling means that the actors are closely intertwined in their decisions. Decisions of one partner reduce the other's degrees of freedom. The configuration dimension focuses on changes over time in the arrangement of relationships between the focal actor and other relevant actors [26]. A stable configuration implies that neither the social environment nor the tasks of the focal actor change rapidly and frequently.

Using coupling and configuration as two basic dimensions for differentiating sub-fields of careers, four 'ideal-type' sub-fields emerge, each characterised, among others, by specific rules about promotion or the value of career capitals.

> Company World stands for the field of the traditional organisational career. It is defined in terms of the two dimensions by tight coupling and a stable configuration between an individual actor and other actors, in most cases represented by an employing company.
> Free-Floating Professionalism can be defined as the field of specialists. Individuals work closely with one customer, but only for a limited time, which results in tight coupling but an unstable configuration.
> Self-Employment is the field of career with individuals working outside organisations. Typically, these are either self-employed professionals or entrepreneurs who work in a rather stable and limited field of expertise. This sort of occupation typically results in comparatively loose coupling between actors, but a stable configuration.
> Chronic Flexibility is characterised by frequent job changes. Unlike in Free-Floating Professionalism, however, there rarely is a single domain of expertise. Changing from one job to another may imply not only a change from one organisation to another, but also from one type of job to a completely different one, from one industry to another, from being employed to self-employment, and so on. Loosely coupled and unstable relations are the key characteristic

Figure 2 shows the results when asking for the respondents' preferred career field five years after graduation.

configuration of actors

	stable	unstable
tight	**Company World** strive for a position of responsibility and influence and a long-term career within one organisation **49.5%**	**Free-floating professionalism** want to be under contract to one or a few organisations for special and challenging tasks, staying with the same organisation only for a limited time **34.1%**
loose	**Self-employed** seek "traditional" self-employment, i.e. offering a range of quite standardized products and/or services to a relatively stable clientele **4.8%**	**Chronic Flexibility** aspire to a "freelancer" career with different projects for various clients and ever-changing work contents **11.6%**

coupling to organisation

Figure 2: Desired career fields for one's professional future (Source: Mayrhofer/Nordhaug/Obeso 2011: 165)

About half of the respondents (49 %) consider alternative A ('company world') as being the closest in regard to their own professional preferences. This reflects a preparedness to enter into a long-term commitment to an employer which is detrimental to the numerous statements about this generation having professionally nomadic preferences. Alternative B ('free-floating professionalism') was supported by 34 % of the respondents, whereas 5 % see themselves as self-employed and 12 % as freelancers ('chronic flexibility').

4.5 Preferences Related to Job and Employer

The respondents were asked about the emphasis they put on a range of factors in regard to choosing their first post-graduation job including opportunities for development, job characteristics, rewards, developmental opportunities and work environment factors. Table 1 shows the ranking of these factors based on an average score on a scale from 1 (low) to 10 (high).

Factors	Average Score	Men	Women
1. Interesting work	9.37	9.26	9.49**
2. Opportunities for competence development	9.18	9.10	9.25
3. Opportunities for personal development	9.15	8.99	9.29**
4. Good social relations among colleagues	8.93	8.71	9.12***
5. Opportunities to work abroad in periods	8.71	8.63	8.78
6. A lot of variety in work tasks	8.62	8.39	8.81***
7. The employer has a good reputation	8.32	8.23	8.40
8. High annual earnings/salary	8.22	8.34	8.10
9. Good personnel policy	7.87	7.48	8.21***
10. Opportunities for fast promotion	7.83	8.10	7.59***
11. A lot of freedom in the job	7.68	7.76	7.61
12. Pay based on individual performance	7.53	7.90	7.21***
13. Systematic career planning	7.41	7.19	7.61**
14. The position has a high status	6.94	7.20	6.70**
15. Good job security	6.88	6.26	7.44***
16. Flexible working hours	6.82	6.65	6.97
17. Large amount of project work	6.29	5.96	6.59***
18. Opportunities to work at home	4.80	4.52	5.06*

***p-value<.01; **p-value<0.05; *p-value<0.10

Table 1: Perceived importance of factors when choosing one's first job (Source: Mayrhofer/Nordhaug/Obeso 2011: 159)

The five highest-scoring factors are interesting work, opportunities to develop competencies, opportunities for personal development, good social relations at the workplace and opportunities to work abroad. These are followed by variety in work tasks, the employer's reputation, high annual earnings, good personnel policy, the employer's reputation, good personnel policy and opportunities for fast promotion. On the basis of these findings, we can conclude that the most important factors are related to four main areas: Challenging work tasks, opportunities for individual development, social environment at work, and earnings and career development

It is worth noting that factors related to earnings and career opportunities do not score highest in this material. Thus the widespread perception in the media that business school students are out and out careerists is not supported: fast career development is ranked tenth and 'high earnings' eighth. Although business graduates will normally obtain a substantial initial salary compared to many other groups of graduates, money is clearly not everything. Indeed the findings suggest that the respondents are, to a certain extent, willing to let pay take second place in order to secure qualitative rewards such as interesting work tasks, opportunities for development and good social relations at work.

4.6 Work-Life-Balance

Contrary to common believes the work-life balance issue is not a crucial priority. Respondents know that the issue is there and they express the importance of leisure time for them. At the same time, however, they are aware that it will be difficult in coming years to enjoy both work and leisure equally:

(Question: 'Which things in your life would you not give up under any circumstances?') Well (sighing)... family, of course! For me my family is very important. And well, I don't know... I, of course, would like to travel but, at the end, I would like to come back here and be close to my family and my friends. And that's something I don't really want to give up, the opportunity of coming back here and being close to them. And... well, of course, in the future I would also like to have a family, my own family, and at some point in my career, I know, I will have to choose, and for me having a family is really important and something I want to do, so if I have to choose, I know that in some point in time my choice will be my family. I wouldn't give this up under any circumstance.

(Question: 'What is important to you in life and why is it important?') Family and friends, and I think in our generation it is getting more and more important to have a good work/life balance. I think that students here won't go to an investment bank because they are afraid of working from 8-midnight and to have no time for life, for another life. So, I think that this is really important, to have a good work and life balance.

5   Implications for HRM practice

A number of practical implications emerge for organizations, basically linked with employer branding [27] and talent management [28]. With regard to attracting talent, it seems that younger generations do not look primarily at the organization itself when looking for a job. Hence, rather than primarily selling the organization as a whole, it seems important to highlight how the concrete job and tasks positively influence the individuals' career capital, e.g. their technical expertise, their industry experience, their ability to take future steps, the size and quality of their professional networks. Members of the new generations look for return on their investments. Unless organizations are able to make it crystal-clear what these returns will be and how individuals can profit from them, it is hard to win them over. In addition, it seems to be important to demonstrate that the organization is a good societal citizen and that the concrete job and the tasks linked to it do not enter the moral twilight zone.

To retain these types of employees, organisations have to provide a 'good deal'. Employees constantly monitor whether they get the most for their future career out of their current employment relationship. At the same time, they are highly mobile and ready to change employer when a better deal comes up. For organizations, a good starting point is to acknowledge this situation and not implicitly count on them being with the organization in the long run. Therefore, it seems to be quite wise to enter into a relaxed *quid-pro-quo* relationship where both sides enter an exchange relationship by investing what they can offer.

Given the importance of a balanced *quid-pro-quo* relationship, the question of compensation and reward becomes especially important. First, it is important to provide a sound material basis. Second, non-tangible aspects are clearly important to this group. In particular, the feeling of being a member of the family and social recognition and admiration are highly valued. Third, and quite likely most important, it is essential for organizations to point out the return on investment for individuals, i.e. how technical and social competences, contacts and networks and future career opportunities grow through the current activities, in illustrating the positive affects by indicating previous job holders and their next career steps which built on their previous experience.

In terms of leadership, members of these generations seem to be not sceptical about leadership *per se*. Setting high standards for good leadership, they are fully expecting and hoping for guidance and advice. At the same time, organizations also can count on the readiness of these individuals to work hard and devote time, energy and passion to a joint cause. They are also feedback-seekers. Giving honest, constant and thorough feedback (e.g. 360-degree appraisals) should be an integral part of the prevailing leadership style. This generation also wants to

make a difference and contribute to something which is important to the organization and to them. By providing them with such opportunities and building a strong sense of joint mission for the tasks or projects at hand, organizations can trigger high-performance behaviour.

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Contact:

Wolfgang Mayrhofer, o.Univ.-Prof. Dr.
WU, Augasse 2-6
1090 Wien
Österreich
Wolfgang.mayrhofer@wu.ac.at

Odd Nordhaug, Prof.
NHH, Helleveien 30
5045 Bergen
 Norge
odd.nordhaug@nhh.no

Carlos Obeso, Prof.
ESADE Avinguda d'Esplugues 92
08034 Barcelona
España
carlos.obeso@esade.edu