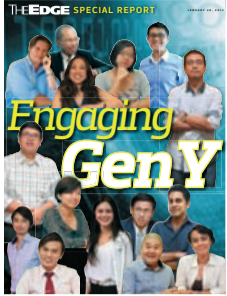


Engaging Gen Y

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Engaging Gen Y



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FOREWORD

BY ANNA TAING



With many Baby Boomers and some Gen X-ers approaching retirement age, Generation Y, or the Millennial Generation, has become the fastest-growing segment of the workforce. They are the generation who will become the leaders of the future. Yet, the perception that lingers even today is that Gen Y are difficult to understand and manage.

Some CEOs have lamented that Gen Y do not stay long enough in one company or a job for them to be able to groom a succession line. However, in many instances today, there are Gen Y who have become corporate leaders themselves, and they run companies that thrive on new technology and innovation.

The question is whether corporate leaders and CEOs are doing enough to engage this talent pool. Clearly, given the growing importance of this group of young talent in the Malaysian workforce, companies and leaders who fail to recognise the need for change run the risk of losing out and becoming irrelevant in the longer term.

This special report, aptly titled “Engaging Gen Y”, is an idea conceived by Johan Mahmood Merican, CEO of Talent Corp, some months ago. In the course of his work, Johan found that while some companies and those in the HR fraternity often complain about Gen Y and how they do not conform, there are also many others who have invested time, money and effort to successfully engage with them, recognising that like it or not, these young people are the backbone of the talent pipeline.

Johan believes that it is perhaps time for the companies who have successfully engaged with Gen Y to tell their story and share their experiences with those who have not, and with those who want to but have no idea how to go about unravelling the so-called Gen Y mystery. “It is incumbent on Corporate Malaysia to better engage Gen Y if we are to attract, retain and motivate our emerging top talent. As evidenced by the companies in this pullout, it is clearly not impossible, a challenge perhaps, but [it comes] with clear dividends in performance for organisations engaging young talent,” he says.

Hence, in the following pages, you will read the views and experiences of corporate leaders — in well-established companies like Maybank and Astro as well as young companies like MindValley and Rhythm and Hues — on how they are handling young talent.

We also spoke to Gen Ys themselves to find out what makes them tick, what they want in life and the kind of career paths they would like to have. In a roundtable discussion with five Gen Ys, the common thread that linked all of them is that they want to be different, to be able to do things their own way but arriving at the goal that is set by their employers, and they want flexibility. They are also very vocal, strong-minded and not afraid to say what they want.

As Astro CEO Datuk Rohana Rozhan, who is more Gen Y in outlook than the Gen X she is, succinctly puts it, it is not leadership by fear when it comes to engaging the youngsters.

Instead, she says, the exuberance and passion in the youths of today should be welcomed and celebrated. From a leadership and management perspective, she opines, you need to win their respect and buy-in by providing guidance, a listening ear and an enabling environment. Only then can you unleash their creativity and talent.

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WHAT GEN Y WANT

What makes Gen Y tick? What do they want in life, and how do they view the workplace? What do they want from their employers and what inspires them? To get an insight, *The Edge* hosted a roundtable discussion with several young professionals. A criteria, we say, is that they must be opinionated, strong minded and vocal with their views. We managed to get to the table Says.com general manager Samuel Wee, DAP public policy research assistant Sharon Ling, Teach for Malaysia recruitment manager and Otak-Otak director Goh Jing Pei, Spaceboy Studios production assistant Sabrina Kamaruddin, and Bank Negara Malaysia associate dealer Andrew Aw. Their average age is 25. The lively discussions were moderated by *The Edge* writer Emily Chow, who is 24.

The Edge: What drew you to your current job?

Samuel Wee: I was ready for a change in environment and industry [he was previously with a bank]. One thing we set out to do at Says.com is that we want to create the workspace of the future. From the way we run the business to the way people apply for their leave, it's done bottom up instead of top down. When I was at the bank, the CEO had asked six of us to create a council of Gen Y executives. He wanted to know what the people were saying, as the attrition rate was quite high then. So the council's work was to find out a few things: firstly, how to attract the best Gen Y talent; secondly, how to get the best out of them; and lastly, how to retain them. From doing that, I thought it would be fun to join a small company, like a test lab to a certain extent, to try out different ideas and strategies to create a workplace of the future.

Andrew Aw: I'm fortunate as my manager is quite hands off. He lets me do whatever I want as long as I perform and deliver the results. The central bank is very traditional, but the people there are actually fun. My manager is very understanding and he gives me space to grow. You might be working at the best company with the best policies, but if your immediate manager loves to micromanage, there's not much point. One of the reasons I joined was because I thought the work would be very challenging — there's a lot of worth in understanding the business scope of treasury management. I learnt very specialised skills but at the same time, was allowed to explore different areas and asset classes.

What sort of work culture ideas attracts you?

Andrew: I think a lot of Internet companies do this [providing an attractive work culture] well. For instance, Google has a 20% work time [allocation] where you're supposed to be working on whatever project you want for one-fifth of your time [at work]. As a result, a bunch of interesting programmes came out from that, like Gmail. Another is you can work anywhere you want and whenever you want, there's no schedule ... [This concept is] called ROWE, Results-Only Work Environment. It's a new trend with the Fortune 500 companies where you can work anywhere at whatever hours as long as you get your work done. We don't have this yet here in Malaysia and it would be great to see this in more companies.

Sabrina Kamaruddin: We're a company of four people and we operate from a house. It's fantastic. We have pets at home, there's no pressure. We come in and out whenever we want and when we get things done we can do as we wish. We can cook in the office and have

friends over, but this took some getting used to because with that liberty and flexible work time, it also meant that I sometimes have to commit to longer hours at the office. On some days, I have nothing to do, but there were days when I had to work until the early hours of the morning.

Apart from work hours, what other areas of flexibility do you appreciate in the workplace?

Goh Jing Pei: Location. The idea that you can choose anywhere you want to work, for example at home, where you don't have to come into the office.

Sabrina: For me it would be the dress code. Working in a creative [industry], you're not just inspired from within or from what's immediately around you but also when someone walks through the door wearing something inspiring or out of the box. That makes you think and get used to other people's styles and quirks. This way, we can be ourselves by showing a creative side and that helps a lot for me.

Samuel: We don't have a dress code but we have one rule: whatever you're wearing, it must not make anyone else at the office feel uncomfortable.

Andrew: The ability to modify your workplace would be cool, like sitting on a bouncy ball instead of a chair, having a skateboard around... things to brighten up your office and stuff that gets people out of the typical 'sit at a computer' kind of pose, to get the creative juices flowing.

Do these things really matter? Does it really help with productivity?

Sabrina: I don't think it's so much about productivity. I think it's more about long-term job satisfaction and long-term growth. You may still do what you're supposed to do in that given amount of time that you're allocated, but will this person love every minute of their job enough that they can envision a greater future within the company or share the dreams and visions of the company? If you don't allow the Gen Y to feel like they are in their home, they won't take care of their home or care much about growing up in that home. They will see it as a place they want to start at but

eventually move out of. So in terms of productivity, it might not make that much of an immediate difference, but it does for long-term growth.

Jing Pei: It also depends on the nature of your work. For instance, in our office, my team recently redid the layout of the whole office space. We regrouped everybody so that instead of facing walls and windows, we face each other. We find that it works better because we can communicate directly. The nature of the work we are doing now requires that sort of collaboration. But not everyone is comfortable with an open office, so you need to be flexible.

What are your expectations in your job scope?

Sharon Ling: It's a little different in politics and policy. You're there to do a good job with the materials given but you're also there to learn about the issues. So for me, what I treasure is not necessarily always time in the office, as that takes away from what can be learned outside in the socio-economic environment. In my job, I appreciate being exposed to multiple issues, whether it's on the ground level like grassroots organising or ongoing day-to-day political events. I also appreciate figuring out how to look at a political issue and address it productively, and for that I'm very glad that my boss is a great mentor, so it also helps to work with a boss or a team that is very communicative.

Andrew: It is the spectrum of challenge that we're given at work. What's important is matching your ability to the work you're doing. If you're doing something that's too easy for you, you'd just be bored all the time, but if it's too difficult you'll be struggling along. It's important to find the right fit for your



“ One of the issues that people find with Gen Y is that people our age think we cannot learn from those perceived to be less intelligent or competent than us. It's not true. You can always learn from everyone.

| **ANDREW**

abilities and to always feel slightly challenged so you can actually master a new skill. It's about figuring out the line of what your ability is and what is a challenge [for you]. It's finding the line where you flow, to keep improving yourself and take on different challenges based on what suits your abilities as they change over time.

Samuel: I agree. It's about constantly allowing a space to grow where there is always a challenge, and not setting limits.

Is company branding important?

Jing Pei: My role right now is to educate people on alternative career paths and try to get people [interested in taking up] teaching as their first job. The whole idea is that you teach first before you launch your career because you learn leadership and hone all kinds of skills through the teaching process. People think about going to traditional [trades] like accounting or banking pathways first but I think that's slowly changing. A high percentage of graduates from places like Oxford, Cambridge and Harvard are applying for teaching programmes and this is very unusual in Asia, where no one will actually say that teaching is their first option.

Andrew: Branding is important to let people know what your company stands for, and it resonates with what you want. For instance, I used to intern at Tesla

Motors and its tagline is 'we want to create the next coolest electric car', and it attracts the type of people the company is looking for. So if you brand your company right, you'll get the kind of people that you want.

Sharon: It's interesting from a non-profit, political or social perspective because one of the main concerns is what this company or organisation does and how it operates in terms of ethics and social impact. In considering a company to work for, I would be interested in looking at things like what the CEO makes compared to their employees, pay equity, or what their records in gender relations or environmental sustainability are like. I think this awareness is growing, particularly with our generation, and since we have the Internet, we can find out about these issues very quickly.

Companies these days are taking measures to engage and retain Gen Y employees. Are they effective?

Samuel: The intent of many companies is staff retention because if we look at the statistics in the last five years, this particular age group rotates more than ever compared to historical data.

Jing Pei: There are more organisations thinking about this [retention measures] but I think they should forget about it because most of us will leave at some point. I think they have to really rethink their methods. For instance, Axiata believes in fostering talent; they want you to come in, give you challenging projects and let you grow. They're pushing the boundaries so talents will get better, even though you will take the skills with you when you leave. And when they put this out in their management training programme, they saw more than 100% [increase in] retention rate, which is very unusual. Something like this is really worth thinking about. If your employees want to go somewhere, help them. In any traditional organisation in the past, you wouldn't let your boss

know if you were applying for another job or programme, but now bosses will ask if you need a recommendation letter, or how they can help you.

Sabrina: Working long term in a company isn't something that we think of as part of our lives, not because we want to shift, but because having options is one thing we really want. We want options and the ability to change because that's how our society is right now. If you don't like a particular job anymore, you want to be able to change and grow with the change.

Samuel: I wouldn't focus on retaining them, but rather on creating the best place for Gen Y to work. What we do at Says.com is try to have a lot of open conversations and we share with the team that we are here to create the best workplace for ourselves, together. It's not just Sam's idea or the founder's idea; everybody has a say in how they want to create the workplace, so involving them in policies like that help.

Andrew: Most Internet brands would be like that. With Zappos, they have this three-month work trial period before you decide to take up their offer, no obligations and you still get paid, so you can get a vibe of what the culture is like in the company.

Jing Pei: Tan Chong, for example, is a traditional family business but their second and third generations are actively thinking about how to compete [to attract Gen Y]. They hire interns but the interns are there to teach the HR people how to manage young people. They turn this into an educative opportunity.

Andrew: Many internship programmes are more of a viral marketing thing where they get interns to come in and make sure they have a good time, so they spread the word [about the company]. More of the bigger corporations are doing the same now — they're engaging young people through social media,

getting people to come in for a few months [for experience]. It's more of a marketing move and it works.

How do you feel about the older generations' perceptions of Gen Y — that you are difficult to work with, always in a hurry and think short term?

Sabrina: I don't take it personally because every generation would think of the next generation as deviant. But look at it this way, if you are going to be led by people who have been thinking the same way for the past 30 to 40 years on the job, you'll need a bunch of new kids to wrestle you off your seat and figure out how to run the company the way it should be run today, and not how it's been run in the past. It's really pessimistic for the older generation to think that our characteristics are a problem when it should actually be a challenge. It's a new reality they have to adapt to, just like technology. It's going to be around, so you might as well pick it up.

Andrew: One of the issues that people find with Gen Y is that people our age think we cannot learn from those perceived to be less intelligent or competent than us. It's not true. You can always learn from everyone. That's one of the largest complaints; people keep moving because they think they can learn more in a certain place, but there's much to learn from people with experience. It's a typical way of thinking with people our age, that if I have a PhD from a university, no one will be able to teach me anything here.

If there were no social boundaries or monetary issues, what would your dream job be?

Sabrina: I would teach, but personally I think I would need some years of experience before I am able to teach.

Sharon: I'm interested in the idea of social enterprise, particularly in terms of tourism heritage and community business development. Social impact and ethical business is one of the new trends coming up with our generation, in the interest of doing good. It doesn't necessarily have to be through public or government means, but through a private enterprise that sustains itself as a public good and views the community as an investment instead of something you can draw profit from. I've been travelling recently to Vietnam and Cambodia where they have interesting enterprises: they promote local heritage and train local artisans, run craft shops ... Some of them even run restaurants or hotels where they train locals who have been orphaned or abandoned as children to be part of the team. I think that's a really interesting example of what the business or company of the future could be like, something that melds together social goals with profit, and I'm quite interested to see if that idea can work in Malaysia.

Andrew: To be honest, if you asked me what I wanted to do long term, [I would say] I have no idea. Steve Jobs said, "Stay hungry, stay foolish", so I say keep on exploring. You're not supposed to discover it immediately. If it happens, that's great, but for most people, you don't discover your true passion until you are 30 or 40. I'm only 24, so I'm not thinking too far ahead. I just try to learn as much as possible.

Samuel: I really enjoy what I'm currently doing, but for something long term, I'd like to do coaching or teaching.

Jing Pei: Never once have I woken up feeling like I didn't want to go to work. I know my general direction is in the field of education and development, but even so that's a very wide scope. So everything in my life is to maximise my own potential. **E**



(Left to right) Samuel Wee, Goh Jing Pei, Andrew Aw, Sabrina Kamaruddin and Sharon Ling

Engaging Gen Y

FROM THE CEO PERSPECTIVE

The majority of corporate leaders are either Baby Boomers or Gen X. With Gen Y a growing and important part of the workforce, do they see the need for different management styles and strategies to ensure an adequate talent pool? We talk to CEOs of three of Malaysia's leading companies. Here is what they say.

PROVIDING INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP

BY ANNA TAING

It's not uncommon for Astro Malaysia CEO Datuk Rohana Rozhan to walk out of her office some days and find some of her young employees waiting outside, eager to talk to her about this or that new idea that they have come up with. Or they write her emails.

"It is this exuberance, this passion that we celebrate and welcome in the youngsters ... and from a leadership and management perspective, the whole idea is to listen, to allow them to try new things and to empower and enable," she says.

In Astro, Rohana runs a relatively "young" organisation where the average age is 28, and more than 50% of the workforce is from Gen Y.

She does not view traits such as impatience, idealism and wanting to make a difference to the world as a Gen Y thing. "I think it's just youth, and we sometimes forget what we were like when we were young, when we were just as impatient, and probably our parents and

employers thought the same thing about us. It's a generational thing, a good thing, and it refreshes all of us."

So, a lot of what Astro does in terms of human resource management and empowerment is very matter of fact and ongoing.

Rohana says she enjoys speaking to young people, and finds it fun and refreshing that they do not filter what they say. And because of the environment they grew up in, they have more choices and are more mobile today. "The world is their oyster, they don't have to stay in one place because travel is so accessible. So I think we must appreciate this, and on our part, provide guidance, a listening ear and conversation, so that we can help them in the decision-making process to maximise their full potential."

In her interaction with them, Rohana finds that what Gen Y look for is inspirational leadership. "It is not leadership by fear, because they need to respect you, and once you have their buy-in, you can unleash their potential and creativity."

So, how does Astro harness the strengths of this new generation?

"Astro is like a campus. We believe in the senior employees because nothing beats experience, subject matter expertise, maturity. So what we do as leaders is to provide an environment that is safe for our younger colleagues to take risks knowing that there is a safety net and they can learn from people who are in the company and grow from it.

"We provide mentoring, coaching, and we empower. If you look at the business that we are in, the reality is that behind the TV programmes and radio shows, there are very strong skill sets — we have the best in class technology and IT platforms, subject matter experts in finance, legal, regulatory, sales, consumer areas ... our strength is to complement one another, no one person is everything, so that the end result is magic on air when we put it on."

Nurturing, therefore, is important. "We have scholarships and trainee programmes. When we hire people, we try to help them manage their career and give them opportunities. For example, if you are a lawyer but come in as a news reader, you can learn the business and be part of the leadership, if you are interested."

Astro, Rohana says, has also created a Gen Next Group, headed by a Gen Y staff, whose whole rhyme and reason for being is to come up with innovative products and services in tandem with Malaysia's changing demographics.

"We provide an ecosystem of innovation because we see technology as an opportunity. We evolved products

like Astro on the Go, where we are addressing the individuals beyond the homes and these people, the majority, are most likely to be the youngsters ... they pull content in a different way and they want immediacy. So, the great thing is having a pool of young talent because the older generation probably won't have a clue about what the young audience wants.

"We have to build an emotional connect with our viewers and to do that, we have to build an empathy and understand each other. Tomorrow, these young people are going to be the breadwinners and own a strong portion of the consumer wallet. If we are not part of them, we might be irrelevant tomorrow, so it's very important that we understand them, keep abreast so that we always stay relevant."

On a personal level, Rohana tries to keep engaged by, among other things, holding skip level meetings where she meets staff from one or two levels down to listen to them, and at the same time, articulate the company's aspirations.

She takes, whenever she can, some Gen Y staff with potential along with her when she travels to look at the best-in-class companies or industries in the world. "This way, they get to know me, and I get to know them, they get to see what other companies are doing and understand the challenges." **E**



"It is this exuberance, this passion that we celebrate and welcome in the youngsters... and from a leadership and management perspective, the whole idea is to listen, to allow them to try new things and to empower and enable"

HARIS HASSAN/THE EDGE



KENNY YAP/THE EDGE

Wahid believes that a highly engaged workforce is more productive and able to contribute to make the organisation a high-performing one

BY ANNA TAING

Datuk Seri Abdul Wahid Omar, Maybank Group president and CEO, is a Baby Boomer who sometimes think he is Gen X. And he enjoys interacting with Gen Y.

He finds them refreshing, highly charged, not afraid to give voice to their views and always wanting to do more. "It also means they can be impatient, always want to do a lot of things, and these are people who value life holistically, they appreciate friendship and place friendship and chilling out with friends equally as important as working."

This does not mean that they are any less productive. "Gen Y benefits from living in a high-enabled environment, when technology is so advanced and knowledge is easily accessible. During my time, I could spend 16 hours working, but guess what? There was a lot of manual work, like drafting my credit papers, which had to be handwritten first and then sent to the clerk for typing... and when we had to do research, we went to the library and jotted down notes. But now, they can Google, go into a company's website, cut and paste... so now you can do a lot more."

Gen Y make up some 30% of May-

BY JENNIFER JACOBS

Gen Y have porous surfaces and they are much more likely to jump in and out of organisations for reasons that may seem inadequate to generations before. They demand flexibility, thrive on uncertainty and are more likely to fly by the seat of their pants.

It falls on CEO Jeffrey Chew's plate to manage this generation in OCBC Bank (M) Bhd. More than half of his organisation is now Gen Y, a change that happened over the past 10 years as OCBC became more aggressive in the Malaysian market and tripled its staff strength.

OCBC was once perceived as a bastion of conservatism, with customers coming from either the older generation or the business community. But behind the scenes, the bank has been working to change both the perception as well as the reality.

Chew talks about how the organisation has changed to meet the needs of a new generation of bankers. "The previous generations had what I call a 'currency lens' with which to evaluate their major decisions in life — what course to take, what job to take. Gen Y have grown up with money, so they can take it for granted. So they look at the world very differently."

Chew has seen this in the company. "We have people who worked with us and resigned after nine months. No, they're not unhappy with their jobs; they love their colleagues and bosses and yes, the job was challenging enough. So how?

"They said that they've managed to save up something in the nine months

WE NEED TO EMPOWER THEM AND PROVIDE GUIDANCE

bank's workforce currently, with Gen X at 55% and Baby Boomers, 15%.

Wahid understands the need to constantly engage with Gen Y and doing it early, given that this group of young people makes up a sizeable portion of the bank's workforce and their number will increase in the future. Every year, the banking group employs some 1,000 new graduates.

Which is why Maybank has a slew of programmes catering to Gen Y, and these include the Branch Management Entry Level Pipeline, a programme that recruits graduates with the purpose of grooming them to become branch managers. This is part of the banking group's efforts to "rejuvenate the organisation", Wahid explains.

Indeed, for 2013, Wahid and members of the bank's executive committee have committed to visit the Maybank Academy and meet with the Gen Y staff for at least two mornings every month. "The first class that I took was with a group below 30, and then last week, I attended a session with 25 participants. I find these young people different; they are more energetic, highly charged and go-getters."

They are also clear on what they want. "When I asked them what they want to be, they said they want to be me,

they want to be CEO and are interested to know what it takes to get there."

Wahid recalls with a chuckle that this was unlike when he first graduated as an accountant, when his first aspiration was to be chief accountant in some company.

While the perception is that Gen Y is more demanding and expects to be able to engage directly with the CEO, Wahid believes that a highly engaged workforce is more productive and able to contribute more to make the organisation a high-performing one.

"In our case, this is proven; we have been improving in our employee engagement index, indeed one of the highest in the country, well above the norm ... when we came up with our management apprentice programme, the retention rate was 60% but now we have improved this to 82%, that's a high rate considering that Gen Y can be impatient."

In terms of career development, Maybank has come up with the concept of 70:20:10 — 70% of the time involves experiential learning, 20% coaching not by immediate superiors but by mentors and certified executive coaches and 10% on classroom training.

Additionally, Maybank tries to cre-

ate a conducive workplace as part of its efforts to retain its Gen Y staff.

The bank has — apart from offering facilities like WiFi access and a well-equipped gym on Level 45, which is well utilised — upgraded its food court to make it more conducive for staff to chill out.

Wahid observes that Gen Y also likes the bank's employee volunteerism programme. The bank conducted a survey that found that employees appreciated the fact that it had corporate social responsibility programmes that they could contribute to.

In a 2012 survey by GTI Media on Malaysia's 100 leading graduate employers, Maybank was ranked third behind PricewaterhouseCoopers and Ernst & Young, in the overall category and was top in the financial services sector.

Says Wahid: "We need to understand them better and empower them in many areas but at the same time, we must provide them with guidance. They want to be more empowered, they want more freedom."

What about flexi working hours, something Gen Y clamour for?

"We still observe Maybank flexi hours — you can come in anytime you like before 8.45am, and go home anytime after 5.30pm," he chortles. **E**

MANAGING AMBIGUITY

they've worked here and wanted to go for a three-month holiday. And I asked, so what are you going to do after the three months, and they don't know. They'll come back and figure it out," he says, still amazed.

Needless to say, this kind of unstructured way of thinking would not have gone down well with his generation. Stability was prized and no one would throw away a good job to take off on a holiday. "But that's the Gen Y today. We [Gen X] like stability and we want to know what to expect. They thrive on chaos and uncertainty."

So now, the bank finds itself having to develop policies to allow for flexibility. "We have to develop policies to accommodate all this change. If we get enough feedback from our employees about something needing to change, we change it. For instance, a lot of people say they don't like the jam in the morning and could they come in a little later. After we got enough feedback, we decided to implement flexi hours. As long as you work eight hours a day, we're good."

Another thing it implemented was the "career break", so employees would not have to quit to find themselves.

"After you've worked for five years, you can take three months' no-pay leave. Or, if you don't think you have enough leave, you can buy leave from the bank. Or if you think you have too much, you can sell it back to the bank."

It has accorded the same flexibility to benefits. "We took our fixed benefits and created a pool called 'flex dollars' so people can choose the benefits they want and if they don't use it up, they can actually be reimbursed for the benefits in cash."

But the flexibility extends to more than just leave and benefits. Recently, the bank started allowing some of its employees to work part-time. "People who have worked with us for a number of years and have a problem, maybe with their children's health or emotional wellbeing, can opt to work part-time."

And, Chew says, bank employees do not dress like, well, bank employees. "To make the environment a bit

more friendly, we're dressed down, most of the time. Not me, I have too many functions to attend. But the rest of them do."

But it is not just a friendly and flexible atmosphere that engages Gen Y. They want to be heard and appreciated. And they want to have their ideas considered seriously. "I have regular teh tarik sessions with them. They tell me what they like about the bank, what they think should be changed, they tell me what their relatives think. They like to tell us how they can impact the world from their little corner, so we give them the opportunity."

How? On top of their routine jobs, they are given assignments, which usually relate to simplifying processes and cutting red tape, taking a lazy man's view of all this paperwork, figuring out how to do things more efficiently.

But the challenge is not only in understanding and adapting to the needs of Gen Y. It's about training the other 45% who are management on how to engage with them. "People always talk about Gen Y's problems and weaknesses. But we should not look at it that way. It's possible that it's our weaknesses. They are more energetic, more adventurous and they want to push ahead more quickly."

"So, the challenge is in how we adapt the management to a different framework to adapt to them," he says.

Basically, he says, OCBC, like other organisations, is figuring it out as it goes along. "As an organisation, we just have to learn to live with ambiguity." **E**

'GAMIFICATION' A NEW TREND

BY JENNIFER JACOBS

Companies ahead of the curve are harnessing game mechanics (relating to video games and social media sites) to engage Gen Y, doing everything from disseminating information on new policies to getting them to collaborate on solving complex business issues.

Managing director of Accenture Interactive in Asean, Marco Ryan, who is also the global head for gamification within the company, says the more enlightened companies (and governments) are using "gamification" to reach out and engage with a generation that has grown up on video games and Facebook.

"If you look at all the games or websites, you've got progress reports, avatars, badges, in fact, a rich immersive experience. A good example might be TripAdvisor, where if you get a minimum number of views, you get one badge, and if you get more views, you get another. You get more recognition by being more involved in that community."

"So, if you could take the secret source of computer and social gaming, the stuff that makes people want to do it and makes it fun, and apply it to really tough business issues, wouldn't that be great?" he asks.

In the past two years, more and more organisations — from Nike to the Singapore government — have been embracing this method to do everything from engaging with customers or employees to collecting health information.

"At Accenture, we use gamification to drive people to understand things that are either very complex or where you have to get a message out to a large number of people. For example, we had something called the 'value pursuit', which is about amplifying value to our clients."

"We encouraged people to play the game and share knowledge and learning and to get more familiar with the concept. And as they got more familiar, we added more points. Some 30% of our consultants were playing it actively globally and we transitioned a very difficult message, a significant change in the way we wanted to act at Accenture in management consulting," says Ryan.

So, that was an example of how Accenture took a difficult business issue and disseminated a new strategy and a new way of working to a massively diverse workforce in a short period of time. "Gamification is great and it is typically Gen Y who are attracted to it because it talks their language, using a way of collaborating, solving and sharing that they are familiar with."

Ryan points out that gamification is a popular focus of some of the more forward-thinking human resource and management teams, as a way of trying to engage inside the company.

He says Gen Y are a complex group and that learning how to manage them has become key on most agendas. "What Gen Y are looking for is trust, empowerment, flexibility and as a rule, they don't take very kindly to being told what they can't do. Overall, we will see organisations shift to a much more open and trusting and less prescriptive behaviour."

If they don't? "This is a generation that measures loyalty in terms of months rather than years. If companies don't change, they are going to lose out on their ability to recruit and retain talent." **E**

“What Gen Y are looking for is trust, empowerment, flexibility and as a rule, they don't take very kindly to being told what they can't do”

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Chew: Gen Y have grown up with money, so they can take it for granted. So they look at the world very differently.



HARIS HASSAN/THE EDGE



Engaging Gen Y

A WINNING APPROACH

Ernst & Young has been in the top 10 of GTI Media's Malaysia's top 100 graduate employers rankings for four consecutive years. What is the company doing right to attract young talent?

BY EMILY CHOW

There is a shift towards education at Ernst & Young (E&Y). With two thirds of the workforce comprising the millennial generation, coaching has become an integral part of E&Y's work culture and practice.

"One of the key things that Gen Y really look for is career growth and development, and with it comes learning opportunities," says senior executive director and Malaysia People Leader Lee Soo Fern. "So, we are big on coaching this year. We are currently going through another round of refresher and training programmes to ensure that every single senior, manager and director on the ground is knowledgeable on how to coach effectively."

E&Y has been in the top 10 of GTI Media's Malaysia's 100 top graduate employers rankings in the last four years. Annually, the accounting and professional services company takes in 500 employees

of the Gen Y age group countrywide, of which 80% are fresh graduates. The bulk of them are in client versus core business services, which makes Gen Y an essential group in delivering services to their clients.

"The general characteristics of Gen Y are that they are tech-savvy, can be impatient and branded as self-centred, and want to achieve things quickly," Lee says. "These characteristics could be pros or cons, depending on the situation. In E&Y's environment, you need people to learn and unlearn knowledge very quickly, so if we position ourselves correctly and utilise their strengths, there are a lot of benefits in having Gen-Y employees in the workforce."

Gen Y also poses a challenge for many current-day employers because of their differences with older members of the workforce. While this may be a catalyst for conflicts, Lee thinks these disagreements can result in a positive outcome.

"Gen Y members are very confident; in being very vocal and opinionated, they always ask 'why' rather than 'how'. Some may view that as disrespectful but I view it as a good thing as it prompts the team to rethink their methods, unlike Baby Boomers who are loyal and do not question," she says. "They also appreciate constructive feedback and respond very well to positive ones, as compared with their older counterparts who don't ask for it as much."

From her experience, Lee notes that Gen Y bring new perspectives and are quick in sharing ideas and disseminating information. "This brings diversity and freshness of ideas to the workforce, which is a priority in E&Y," she says. "Young people don't mind pushing the boundaries, because they are willing to take on new tasks, try different solutions and confront risks and chances."

"Gen Y employees are achievement oriented and ambitious. They want to take on new challenges and achieve new heights very quickly, but they must be taught to do it well and to take ownership of what they are working on in order to do this."

Coaching and mentoring play a major role in fostering a team atmosphere at E&Y, which is enhanced by a counsellor and counsellee initiative. Each employee who joins the company is assigned a counsellor, whose role is to ensure that he delivers his best.

"In a formal sense, they meet three times a year to sit down with paperwork and discuss career plans," explains Lee. "But on a day-to-day basis, there is no stopping the counsellor and counsellee from having meaningful conversations in terms of where the latter is in his career."

For that reason, E&Y practises an open-door policy to bridge barriers between all employee levels. Lee says Gen Y don't like the top-down approach; rather, they want to be involved, which is also in line with E&Y's value sets that emphasise teaming and empowerment.

"Mutual respect is important here; we give people the space to be individuals and themselves, which is well received by Gen Y," says Lee. "They also like organisations that focus on giving back to the community; they want to make a difference. Corporate social responsibility

“Gen Y employees are achievement oriented and ambitious. They want to take on new challenges and achieve new heights very quickly, but they must be taught to do it well.”

is a big thing for them, and being a knowledge organisation, we are well placed to do that."

Part of E&Y's work culture in attracting the Gen Y crowd is its flexibility with hours and liquid space, which is promoted in the workplace itself. Lee also elaborates on E&Y's formal flexible work arrangements, although those usually come with a business case.

"For example, employees can work from home, on a part-time basis or ar-

range for a reduced work schedule," she says. "However, it's currently only for managers and above or those with greater needs, because with flexibility comes responsibility. They need to be accountable and know how to take ownership of how they conduct themselves as well."

Since technology is strongly featured at E&Y, employees are encouraged to work outside of the office if they are able to. Remote access to the office allows the possibility of being at a client's office or home, as long as the work is completed and delivered. Other areas of flexibility include allowances for employees to transfer from one service line or office to another, either on secondment or a permanent basis.

Unlike many traditionally structured companies, workers are given access to social media and networking sites. "We feel that there are pros and cons to that, but it portrays the firm at the forefront of innovation because this is the Internet age, and Gen Y are the people who view information as important," Lee opines. "They want to be able to connect quickly with their friends, as building relationships is important to them."

"As the Internet generation in a borderless world, they are global citizens who are globally and culturally aware," she continues. "Working with people across borders is not an issue for them, which is a good thing to us because we are a global organisation, and closer to home, we operate as an area organisation."

As it is in a service industry with rigorous demands, E&Y strives for its employees to maintain an optimal work-life balance in order to attract and retain talented Gen Y. "We need to continue focusing on our strengths and the area of work-life balance, which,

in our profession, is a really fine balance that is difficult to achieve," says Lee. "You've heard about peak periods, clients' requests and deadlines... It's also a fine balance for the management in meeting clients' and our people's expectations simultaneously."

"But as a firm, we are trying to find ways to make this even better and more achievable for our people. We advise them to carve out something that is achievable in balancing their career development and personal pursuits," she says.

When it comes to loyalty, Lee opines that a Gen-Y employee will inevitably leave a firm whether or not there are specific strategies to retain young talent. They aren't necessarily unhappy, she says, but feel the need to pursue other ventures to prevent boredom. "A Gen-Y person will leave to try something different. There is no such thing as staying [at one particular company] for life —they might look for other challenges in another organisation or take up a new career path. In being ambitious, they want to achieve great things in a short time, so if they can't get that internally, they will go to a different place."

"We have internalised that, so we focus on our strengths to engage them. We'll continue to work on our culture, share and expound on teaming and empowerment, and value individuals as their own in constantly benchmarking and ensuring that we have appropriate remuneration strategy," Lee says.

Above all, Gen Y values a meaningful career, thus, they are drawn to firms such as E&Y, which emphasise people focus. "Culture being one of our strengths, our people-focus culture is key and paramount," says Lee. "We will continue to do the things that we do best in giving people a meaningful career, providing career and learning opportunities at the right place and the right time." ■



LEE SOO FERN, SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND MALAYSIA PEOPLE LEADER AT ERNST & YOUNG